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CALIFORNIA JOE'S FIRST TRAIL.

A STORY OF THE DESTROYING
ANGELS.

BY COL. THOMAS HOYER MONSTERY,

CHAMPION-AT-ARMS OF THE TWO AMERICAS.

MEMBER OF THE PIONEER CLUB OF FRISCO, AND AUTHOR OF "THE DEMON DUELIST," ETC., ETC.



JOE'S HORSE STAGGERED, THEN PITCHED FORWARD ON ITS HEAD, WHILE ALICE'S ANIMAL, WITH A SNORT OF TERROR, SET OFF FULL SPEED.

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A Story of the Destroying Angels.

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CHAPTER I.

THE YOUNG ROVER.

OUT on the green plains of the boundless West, before all mystery had parted from them; ere the scream of the locomotive had forever banished the buffalo and antelope, a small train of wagons was winding its way, following the great Overland Trail—highway for all the restless spirits of the American Union, during the gold fever of the early days of California.

Just such trains were passing all the time, that year and several years before and after, for the fever was at its height, and San Francisco was in the process of development from a village of two or three hundred people to a city of twenty thousand inhabitants, in the space of three years or less.

When first those trains began to traverse the great plains they were compelled to go in large bodies for protection from the numerous Indians; but, by the time the fever had lasted a year or so, the number of emigrants had so increased, and the Government had sent in so many troops that it was common for parties of three or four wagons, sometimes even single vehicles, to cross the plains with safety in most parts, other localities being dangerous and only to be traversed by large caravans, which accumulated at the great halting-places, till enough fighting-men had been gathered to make the transit safe.

On the banks of the Kansas, close to the border town of Independence, Missouri, and within range of the scouting parties from Fort Leavenworth, the perils of the passage had not yet become apparent, and the little caravan with which we have to do only numbered four wagons and two families, which counted five able-bodied men for defenders of several women and children.

Around them spread the waving verdure of the lower plains, not as yet replaced by the short "buffalo-grass" of the arid belt.

The current of the river slowly wound its way along, and, as the sun sunk toward the west, the little train came to a halt by a place where the descent was practicable, where the horses were unhitched and turned out to feed, while the women of the party set to work to cook supper, and the men pitched the tents in which they were to sleep. These men were all of the stamp of pioneers, that made California a land of such untiring energy, in its early history.

The oldest was a stout, farmer-looking person, about fifty, and it was easy to see that three of the other men were his sons, from the family likeness; while the fifth member of the party was as undoubtedly a stranger by blood to the rest, if not of another race altogether.

The Scott family owned three of the wagons of the little caravan, to which the other man, whose name was Gabelle, had joined himself for protection—"mutual" he called it. In reality the protection was all one-sided, for Gabelle was a nervous Frenchman from New Orleans, who had never fired a rifle in his life before he came on the plains, while the Scotts, who were Tennesseans, were all hunters of more or less fame in their native county, and prepared to take care of themselves, in any ordinary emergency.

Gabelle had brought with him his wife and a number of little dirty boys, all with black hair and eyes, and a capacity to chatter French and English indifferently, born of the habit of speaking one language in the family and another to strangers. Their mother was a stout woman, with a taste for smoking pipes and chewing snuff, which had given her a cadaverous aspect, and she affected flannel short gowns and striped petticoats, that were washed only when necessity compelled, while the Scott girls and their mother, having come of New England stock originally, had preserved the habits of their ancestry and always looked neat and clean.

As the sun set, the two parties sat down to supper at their respective fires, and the difference in fare was evident at a glance. The Tennesseans had nothing but the traditional "hog and hominy," while the Creoles had concocted a savory stew out of the carcasses of several prairie dogs or marmots, which the father of the family, who was practicing shooting all the while in the hope of becoming an expert, had managed to knock down at their holes, as they basked in the sun.

Nothing coming amiss to Pierre Gabelle in the way of eating, he had taken the prairie dogs, several rattlesnakes, which he had killed in the same holes, along with one of the queer little owls which frequent the curious fraternity, and had made of all a stew which certainly possessed a most appetizing savor, as it simmered away in the pot, in the process of warming-up, which preceded the supper; that supper being a remnant from the previous halt.

Snake, owl and prairie dog, together, made a stew at which the Scotts turned up their noses, with all the prejudice of the born Yankee and western man at anything to which his fathers have not been accustomed; but the little Gabelles ate heartily at their own fire, while the Scotts devoured their pork

and fried hominy, in the proud consciousness that they were ever so much better than their neighbors.

Jim Scott, the eldest son of the house, was still crunching the last morsel of his supper, and looking out over the prairie to the east, when he ejaculated:

"By gosh, dad, thar comes a stranger, jest too late fur grub."

Old Scott turned his head to see what his son meant; when he saw the figure of a man on a lean, raw-boned mule, coming over a swell at a little distance, and said comfortingly:

"Waal, boy, the pork ain't all gone yet, and 'tain't much trouble to fry a little more. The stranger's welcome, I reckon. Tennessee ain't goin' back on a stranger, ef he's honest, and this 'un looks, as fur as I kin see, as if he was a white man, and hungry."

Tom Scott, the second son, rose as the stranger rode in, and advanced to the edge of the little encampment, with the hospitable shout, from lungs of leather:

"Helloa, stranger, git off yer critter, and h'ist in some grub."

The stranger, now that he was near enough to be inspected, turned out to be a tall, raw-boned boy not much over twenty, of much the same make as the mule he bestrode, with a long face, set in a serious, rather owlish expression, that agreed well with his dress, to show him one who had not mingled much in any society save that of the frontier.

He was dressed in a suit of blue "Kentucky Jean," and wore an old straw hat, of "plantation" variety, while his rough cow-hide boots were thrust into the pair of old rusty stirrups that looked as if they had come down from Noah's Ark, or something equally ancient.

He bore across the pommel of his low saddle, of the common "citizen's" kind, an old rifle, long and heavy in the barrel, with a bore the size of a pea, while his leathern belt was ornamented with the haft of a huge butcher-knife, in a sheath, that looked as if it had seen a good deal of service.

Such was his appearance and equipment, and something in both was so familiar to the men at the fire, that Tom Scott added, as he shook hands warmly with the young stranger:

"Seems to me you come from aour parts, stranger. My name's Scott, from Tennessee."

"And I was raised in Lincoln caounty, Kaintuck; last hailin' from Cass caounty, Missourer," was the reply, with a grin that altered the whole expression of the face of the young stranger. "What have ye got in the pot, boys?"

He was dismounting from his horse as he spoke, and, a few moments later, was shaking hands vigorously with the men of the party, while the good wife of Jim Scott, who had been cutting a new slice of pork, while the men were greeting the new-comer, called out:

"Git ready in a minit, stranger. Nothen' but hog and hominy; but ye're welcome to that."

The young man laughed good-naturedly as he replied:

"Reckin I kin struggle along on it, missis. Got anything in the jug, fellers?"

The hint seemed to be understood; for old Scott was already hauling out, from the back of one of the wagons, a stone jug of familiar appearance, and he brought it to the young man, with the curt salutation:

"Help yerself, stranger, and drink hearty."

Then, at a signal from the old man, the whole party turned their backs at once, and seemed to be engaged in staring across the Neosho, while the young stranger put the bottle up to his mouth, and held it suspended there, for the space of some half-minute, during which gurgling sounds proceeded therefrom, when he uttered a long sigh of satisfaction, breathed hard several times, and set down the jug, with the remark:

"Apple-jack, and prime, too. Mister, that 'ere's jest the real thing, and no mistake."

Then, and not till then, the old farmer turned round to say:

"Take another horn. 'Twon't hurt ye."

The other smiled as he answered:

"Thankee, mister; but it ain't the thing till I've h'isted in some grub. Any one could see you-'uns is from Tennessee. Haow long hev ye b'en on the road?"

"'Baout a month, sence we left the old homestead," the farmer replied, with a slight sigh.

"Tain't easy to do, stranger; but when the stuns gits the best of the corn, and the sharks gits thar claws on the place, what's done can't be helped, and the best way is to git up and git."

Then he added:

"And haow long hev you b'en on the trail?"

"Sence yesterday mornin'," the young man replied, with a smile that showed how jolly he could look on occasion. "Got tied up to the nicest gal in aour parts last month, and had to do suthin' ye know. Dad allowed as haow he'd h'ard a right smart sight about this Californy, and the old woman she allowed that thar warn't much to hope fur to hum. So I took the ole mule and lit aout; and hyar I be, stranger."

"And what mou't yer name be?" asked the farmer, as he accompanied the other toward the fire, where the hissing of the pan showed that the pork was nearly done.

The young man hesitated for a moment, and then said:

"Waal, stranger, I won't lie. My name ain't what it used ter be; but I'm baound to git to Californy or bu'st. My name's Californy Joe, hit or miss; and thar's whar I live."

"Bully for you, Californy Joe," responded Scott, amicably. "Ef you want to git thar, why shedn't

we jine carryvans and git over the graound together, sosh'ble like? Me and you cums from the same place, as might be—fur thar ain't much choose atween Missourer, Kaintuck and ole Tennessee—and we mou't as well go the trail gether."

California Joe cast a scrutinizing look round the wagons, and what he saw there seemed to please him, for he said at once:

"Waal, mister, ef you're agreeable, and the rest of the boys, I ain't the man to growl. I know whe I'm well off, and I don't want to move aout of th' craowd."

So it was settled at once, and California Joe was duly installed a member of the caravan, just as Jim Scott cried out:

"Gosh darn it all, hyar comes another man! Ef this goes on, dad, we'll git an army arter awhile."

The cause of his speech was the approach of another stranger, who was coming up on foot, leading a very small mule behind him.

CHAPTER II.

OLD SIMPLICITY.

THE new-comer was as great a contrast to California Joe in appearance as could well be imagined. The Kentuckian was six feet two in his stockings, with the frame of a young Hercules; the other man was of medium light and slenderly built, to all seeming.

California Joe had the regular careless, dare-devil look of the Western man, who drinks freely and fights as freely, while the stranger was as meek as Moses in his expression of face.

He wore his hair long and flowing, over his shoulders, where it hung like skeins of flax, in color and straightness, while his clean-shaven face was as open and guileless as that of a child, and his mild blue eyes seemed as if they had never flashed in anger in the life of their owner.

His dress was as singular in that locality as the meekness of his face, for he wore a suit of black broadcloth, of the regular ministerial cut, with a "shad-belly" coat, a white choker round his neck; the uniform recognized all over the Union at that time as the habiliment of a preacher or exhorter of the Methodist persuasion.

Of weapons for his protection he seemed to be guiltless: for his only support in that line was a big umbrella, of the bulgiest kind, which he used as a walking-staff as he came toward the camp, leading behind him the mule.

This mule, of itself, had nothing remarkable about it, save the smallness of its size and the thickness of its legs. It trudged along under the load it was carrying as if it did not mind it in the least, and appeared to be on the best terms with the man who was leading it, for it frequently rubbed its head against his arm, and tried to get at his side pockets, as if accustomed to be fed thence and otherwise petted. This man seemed, as near as one could make out from his light hair and shaven face, to be about forty years old.

He came up to the camp, where all men and women, stared at him stupidly, and taking off his broad-brimmed hat, said with a benevolent smile:

"Friends all, the Lord be with ye. Can a simple man and guileless make his camp with ye, for protection from the ravening beasts and the savage men of the plain, that devour and spare not?"

The words he used, and the tone in which he spoke were those which had often been heard by the men he addressed, for the itinerant Methodist circuit-rider was quite a common character in those days; but there was also something in both that froze them up, for the hospitality which they had shown to California Joe vanished entirely. The Scotts kept their seats by the fire, and old Scott looked over his shoulder at the new-comer to say:

"The preerie's wide enough, stranger. Ye kin go inter camp whar ye like, I s'pose."

Then, as the stranger's face fell slightly, as if he had expected a courteous reception, Scott added:

"Don't tie that mule too near them of mine, or mebber he'll have trouble. They kin kick bad, and I don't want to see ye hurted."

A faint smile crossed the benevolent features of the strange man in black, and he said:

"Thanks, friend; but little Charity can take care of herself, I guess. I will not put you to any more inconvenience than I can help."

So saying, he led the small mule away from the immediate vicinity of the camp, and proceeded to unload her, in a way that showed him to be by no means unused to camping out.

He loosed the girth of the pack-saddle and lifted it off the little mule's back, load and all, depositing the whole apparatus on the grass; led the animal down to the river to drink, and then staked her out in a place where the grass was thick and luxuriant, but at a distance from the other animals of the caravan, when she fell to work with an appetite that showed her to be in good condition for a journey.

Then he opened his pack, and produced therefrom a fryingpan and stores of all kinds, with which he proceeded to make his solitary camp at a little distance from the rest. He did not even come near their fire to borrow coals, but set himself patiently to pick up dry sticks in the bushes that fringed the bank of the river, and made his fire for himself.

The Scotts watched him with a sense that they had been churlish in their reception, and the young Kentuckian who had joined them colored slightly as he looked at the quiet, meek man, who was making his camp so inoffensively, as if he had been a pariah unworthy to associate with the rest.

At last California Joe said to Tom Scott:

"Seems like a simple ole feller. Wonder ef he

reely means to cross the plains. He'll get eaten up sure."

Tom Scott shrugged his shoulders.

"Not much loss, I reckon. Them darned Methodist preachers is p'izen, anyway. Let him go back whar he come from."

The Frenchman, who had been watching the scene from his fire, here got up, and said something to his wife in their native tongue, which caused her to nod her head, and say cordially:

"Certainement."

Then Gabelle took a tin pail, and filled it with the last remains of the savory stew on which his family had been feasting, with which, in his hand, he marched over to the fire, where the man in black was beginning to cook his frugal supper.

As far as Gabelle could see, it consisted of a tin pot of coffee and some cakes of flour and water, which he was kneading up to bake on the embers of the little fire, in the fryingpan.

As Gabelle approached, the other looked up, and said with a pleasant smile:

"Welcome, friend. It is but little I can offer thee, but that little is thine and welcome, as soon as I have cooked it."

Gabelle shook his head as he said:

"Merci, sare. I bring you some of my supper. Vill you do me ze honneur to take it?"

The stranger looked at the tin pail, which still emitted quite a fragrant savor, and answered:

"Friend, I take the kindness as it is meant. To tell the truth, I am faint and an hungered. I will eat of what thou hast given me, and be thankful."

And he took the pail and poured the contents into a large wooden bowl, which he took from his pack, while Gabelle, who seemed to be pleased with what he had done, added:

"Sare, my nation is polite, *avant tout*—dat is, above all. If you would like to join my partee, you s'all be welcome."

The man in black smiled again, in the same benevolent way, as he replied:

"Friend, it is all one now. Thy friends yonder do not like me, because they think I am not of this world, but the prairie will hold us all. I will not trouble thee for to-night, but I thank thee for this supper, which I will eat."

And he proved the sincerity of his words by eating heartily of the savory stew, without asking any questions.

Gabelle watched him with a hospitable smile, and, when the stranger had finished, he said:

"Sare, my name is Pierre Gabelle. I am happee to see you."

The stranger wiped his mouth on a corner of a towel which he took from his pack, and answered:

"Friend Gabelle, the supper was a good one and thou art a good Samaritan. My name is Simplicity Fox, and I am a deacon in my church. Now that Charity has finished her supper, I will bring her in; for, verily I say unto you, that there are bad men on the prairie at all times, and the thieves are always about."

So saying, he rose and went after his mule, which he brought up beside his little fire, and proceeded to make his preparations for the night, as the Scotts were entering their tent, and the Gabelle family bestowed itself in the huge wagon which held them, and all but the old man, who slept under the wheels.

Simplicity Fox first took the huge umbrella, which they had noticed under his arm when he came in, and spread it out into a circumference of at least twenty-four feet; for the ribs spread out four feet on all sides, and the umbrella, when it was furled, was at least six feet long, including the stick.

The deacon then stretched cords, and made a complete tent out of the umbrella, a wall of cotton stuff being suspended from the ends of the ribs all round, and pegged down to the ground.

Into this small habitation he brought all his belongings, and made his preparations for sleep, to the wonder and amusement of the Scott family, who were disposed to be jocular over the stranger, when they heard from Gabelle what was his singular name.

The moon was at the full that night, and the whisky jug was by no means empty yet, or there might have been no temptation to disturb the solemn stranger; but as the men sat round the fire, after the women had gone to bed, they took so much whisky that the spirit of practical joking and petty persecution, which is always latent in the western man, took possession of them, and Tom Scott, as soon as the stranger had retired into his tent for the night, observed:

"Say, dad, that feller ain't no fittin' company fur us, now. He'll bring us bad luck, with his darned long face and black cloze. Let's give him notice to quit."

California Joe looked up, and said gravely:

"Seems to me I wouldn't do that. The pore critter ain't doin' nobody no harm. Let him sleep."

Tom Scott, who was just drunk enough to be ugly, sneered as he replied:

"Oh, to blazes with him anyhaow. He ain't got no call to come up to aour fire. I'm a-goin' to have some fun. See if I ain't."

So saying, he rose, and with a somewhat unsteady gait, walked over to the funny little tent, while the rest watched him, with the grin of half-amused, half-doubtful interest, that a party of drunken men are wont to display, when one of their number tries some rude practical joke, on an inoffensive stranger.

Tom Scott went up to the tent and rapped on it smartly, crying:

"Hello, Simplicity, wake up and pay fur yer lodgin'."

Then he began to shake the tent, and the black

form of the stranger came out, with a suddenness that amazed everybody, as Simplicity demanded in stern tones:

"What wouldst thou, man of Belial?"

The rest of the men at the other fire nudged each other, for they felt, from the tone of voice, that the rude address had angered the stranger, and they were in that frame of mind that they wanted to see what he was made of.

As for Tom Scott, he squared his frame before the meek stranger, and roared out:

"I kin wrestle you fur ten cents, and break your darned back."

Old Simplicity immediately backed away and cried out earnestly:

"Depart from me, thou man of Belial; for thy speech is not of my world. I do not wish to harm thee, but if thou layest hands on a servant of the Lord, he will give me strength."

So saying, he threw his coat on the grass in the moonlight, and kept on backing away, as Tom advanced, squaring off with his fists, and venting all sorts of abuse on the stranger.

California Joe started up, crying:

"It's a darnation shame to pick on that pore feller, and it's got to stop."

And with that, he ran to where Tom Scott was still vamping and swearing at the inoffensive Simplicity, and caught the young man by the shoulder, with a strength that made the whisky go out of Tom in short order, when he felt the giant grip, as he said fiercely:

"Let that man alone, or you and me fights. D'ye hyar, sir?"

Tom, who was pulled back almost off his feet, by the grip of California Joe, tried to turn it off with a laugh:

"I didn't mean nothen', Joe," he said.

CHAPTER III.

A DECEIVING DEACON.

OLD SIMPLICITY heard what the generous young man was saying, and Tom's reply, and now he broke out, in the figurative language which seemed to be the most natural to him:

"Blessed art thou, young man, and blessed is the peacemaker. All unworthy servant as I am, if this young man thinks he can tread on me with impunity, he shall find that the strength of the Lord is on his servants."

Joe only half understood him; but Tom, who was just drunk enough to be obstinate, called out:

"Oh! dry up, you old fool. If it hadn't been fur this boy, as is the best man in camp, I'd ha' bu'sted yer old shebang to flinders. Take yer ole mule out of hyar. We don't want no preachin' round aour camp. Thar, Joe, I ain't goin' to hit him, but he kin go somewhar else."

"And so kin I," responded California Joe, in his sharpest tones. "I say this hyar gentleman is got to be left alone, Tom Scott!"

"And I say the best thing ye can do, ef ye don't like the company ye're in, is to git up and git!" responded Tom, sulkily. "You ain't the boss of this camp."

Here the man in black, who had been watching the others silently, since the quarrel seemed to be transferred from himself to them, put in:

"Young man, do not get into trouble on my account. I am willing, if it will please this man of Belial, to try him at a side-hold, for fun."

Tom Scott immediately uttered a yell of delight, and Joe as instantly stepped aside, saying:

"Waal, deacon, ef that's yer idee, go in."

Tom Scott advanced toward the other, and the deacon, who had taken off his coat before, now sidled up to the athletic young Tennessean and allowed the other to take hold of him.

Tom, who was a good-natured fellow after all, remarked:

"You kin take the inside, ef ye like, stranger. I don't want to be hoggish."

"I thank thee, friend," was the quiet reply. "I will take thine offer."

So saying, they grasped each other in the familiar style of wrestling known as the "side-hold" and in another moment Tom had lifted the deacon from the earth, and held him suspended from his right hip—a maneuver that the other did not resist in the slightest.

There he hung for several seconds, when Tom made a violent effort to throw him on his back. To the surprise and delight of California Joe, the deacon twisted round in the air, and as he came down, by some trick hard to perceive, so rapidly was it executed, came on his feet between those of the young Tennessean, and bent forward, throwing Tom Scott, as if he had been a baby, up in the air and flat on his back, with a thud that shook the breath out of his body, and elicited a grunt of pain as he fell.

The young Tennessean lay where he had been deposited, for the space of half a minute or more, when he slowly rose on his hands, and sat up, staring at the deacon with an air of profound wonder, as he ejaculated, between gasps:

"Good Lord almighty! what made ye do that?"

California Joe burst out into a roar of laughter, as he cried:

"Waal, ef that warn't the prettiest trip I ever see'd, in all my born days! Deacon, you're a holy terror to snakes; you air. Reckin ye kin take keer of yerself, arter this."

A dry sort of smile crossed the features of the deacon, as he answered:

"Friend, I wish nobody any harm; but I, too, have been in the wicked world, ere this, though I have abandoned all its hollow delights; and I never saw the man that could best me at a side-hold, or

some other things that had best not be mentioned here. I can sleep now, I suppose."

Tom Scott rose slowly and stiffly, and remarked with a rueful grin:

"Reckin ye kin, stranger. I don't take any more of that sorter thing in mine: much obleeged."

And Tom went off to his couch, to be bantered and jeered at by his brothers, for being overcome so easily by the deacon, to all which his only reply was:

"Cackle away, all of ye. Ef ye want to tackle him at a side-holt, ye kin do it, and mebbe ye won't laugh so much, arter ye git through."

Old Farmer Scott, at this reply, rose and said:

"Ef that's the way ye talk, by gum, I'm a-goin' to try him too. I ain't the man to take water from no feller in a shad-belly coat."

And with that he walked over to where the man in black was quietly talking to California Joe, and remarked:

"Stranger, ye did that trick darned well; but I ain't the man to stand by and see my boys git whipped by no black son of a gun, like you. Take keer of yerself, ef ye don't know what a rough-and-tumble is; fur I'm a-goin' fur ye."

And off went his coat on the grass, with a deliberation that showed he meant what he said, when the stranger, who had retained his vest in the tussle with Tom, instantly threw it off, crying earnestly as he did so:

"Friend, I am a man of peace and seek no quarrel with thee. Keep from me and I will keep from thee; but if the temper of Belial is on thee and nothing will do thee but a whipping, then give me time to get into the ways of the wicked world."

Farmer Scott laughed as he replied:

"Oh, I'll give ye all the time ye want; but ye've got to fight all the same."

And he took off his own shirt and stripped to his waist, while the solemn stranger did the same, revealing to the eyes of California Joe who was watching him attentively, a figure such as he had never seen before.

The mountain-men are big-boned, but they are not apt to have the symmetrical development, of the antique statue, and when they see a man who has such a development, they think that he cannot amount to much, placing their faith in the big bulging muscles of the biceps, and the build of a man's shoulders alone.

In this the stranger was not remarkable, for the predominant characteristic of his figure, in the moonlight, was that of extreme beauty of outline and evenness of contour.

Now that he was not disfigured by the black dress of his calling, he looked remarkably vigorous as he stood there in the moonlight, and the farmer, who was thick-set and sturdy, seemed clumsy beside him.

But the disparity in size and apparent weight between the two was so great that California Joe thrust his body between them, to say earnestly:

"Look a-hyar, Scott, this ain't the squar' thing, to go pickin' on this man. He ain't able fur you, and you hadn't oughter want to whip him."

Scott hesitated; but, to Joe's surprise it was Simplicity who said:

"Thou meanest well, young man, but it is not needed. The Lord will give his servant strength, as he did to Samson of old. Stand aside and let this man of Belial come at me, *if he dares*."

The word inflamed Scott at once, and he shouted out savagely:

"Dares! I'll show ye whether I dare or not. Naow fur ye, and look aout that ye take yer eyes outer this fight. I'm a gouger—I am!"

As he spoke he rushed at the deacon, and Joe, with the notion that fair play was to be shown at all hazards, since the deacon would not give back, stepped to one side and let the combatants come together.

Scott made a rush at the other, trying to catch him round the waist and throw him, in the usual rough-and-tumble style, in vogue at the time all over the Union.

Joe stood back and watched.

He saw the deacon step nimbly aside as the other made his rush, and Scott missed his grasp, when Simplicity gave a swift turn with his foot, as the Tennessean tried to recover himself, and sent him headlong to the ground on his face.

Before Scott could recover, the active stranger made a leap and brought both his feet down on the middle of the Tennessean's back, where he fell on his knees with all his weight, bringing a grunt out of the excited man.

Scott tried to writhe round and catch the deacon, but, before he could do it, the other had leaped away and was dancing to and fro round his prospective antagonist, singing softly:

"And if you get there before I do,

Glory! Glory!

Just tell the Lord I'm coming too,

Glory to the Lord!"

But Scott managed to get up at last, and stood there, with a strange expression.

He did not seem to be inclined to rush any more, and there was a pallor on his face that showed that he had been severely hurt in the short tussle.

What had happened Joe could not tell, but in a moment more the farmer seemed to have got over it, and, with a scowl and deep curse, advanced more cautiously to the attack, as if to measure his distance.

The deacon retreated, with the same smile on his face, singing the same hymn as softly as before, till the farmer was near him and about to let out one of his sledge-hammer blows.

Then he suddenly leaped in the air, with an

agility that Joe had never seen in a human being before, and planted both heels in the face of the Tennessean, knocking him back on the grass, where he lay like a corpse, struck senseless by that single blow.

Then the meek-looking man started to the fire, where the other two Scott boys were staring at the fray, and observed coolly:

"Come, brethren, while the hand of the Lord is on me, I may as well smite Belial to the earth. Is there another of the family that wants to be converted from the error of his ways?"

Jim Scott and his brother Bob stared at this remarkable personage, and Jim with some little tremor in his voice, said:

"Thankee, stranger, but I ain't no hog. I don't want nothen' to do with ye."

The deacon smiled, with the same benevolence that had marked his mien all along, as he said:

"Friend, thou art wise in thy generation. How is it with thy brother? While the Spirit of the Lord is on me, I must be up and doing. It would be a good work to convert a whole family from the ways of darkness."

Bob grinned.

"Thankee fur nothen', stranger," he said. "The old man hadn't orter gone whar he did, and I ain't the one to b'ar malice fur a fa'r fight."

The deacon laughed, as he replied:

"Then let us have peace, hereafter. The Lord be with you."

And he stalked back to his own little tent, and was going inside, when old Scott gave a groan, and California Joe took him up in his strong arms, and helped him away, saying as he did so:

"Ye would have it, and naow 'tain't no time to squeal, Scott."

The deacon looked after them as they went, the farmer not able to walk, but supported by the big, ungainly-looking young man, and something in the affair seemed to strike him in a ludicrous light, for he laughed to himself, and re-entered his tent, where he was no more disturbed.

The night wore away, and the first peep of dawn found the Scotts out of the tent, getting breakfast ready, while the French family, having finished the savory stew, the night before, was obliged to come down to the same salt pork and sodden bread, cooked in a fryingpan, which was the staple fare of the Scotts. As for the deacon, that worthy man was up before any of them, and they saw him go down to the river and wash himself, with a care and precision that was a revelation to the Scott family, and still more to the little Gabelles, who did as little washing as they possibly could, at most times.

Then he came back to his little mule, struck his curious tent, and began to cook his simple breakfast, which he did in a way that showed he was used to taking care of himself.

The Scotts looked rather sulky that morning, and when the wagon was ready to start, the old man took the reins, and went off across the prairie, without waiting for any one else, even California Joe, who, on his part, did not appear to care much what they did.

When the Gabelles started out, the deacon and Joe went with them, the Scotts being far ahead.

CHAPTER IV.

A HOLY GUIDE.

THE way of the little caravan, that day, lay through a beautiful, green, waving prairie, with the grass up to the horses' bellies, as soon as the broad trail was left behind; for it was early spring and everything at its best.

California Joe rode ahead of the Gabelle wagon, and the deacon walked beside him, leading the little mule, and stepping out with a free gait that showed him to be used to that method of locomotion.

Joe's mule was a big, ungainly animal, not fast, but stanch and untiring, and it had a swift walk, which is a great desideratum in a long march.

The deacon seemed to be able to march as fast as the mule, for he carried nothing but the umbrella, and had put his black coat on the load, before starting that morning.

They soon outstripped the wagon of the Gabelles, and came up with that of the Scotts, which was going slowly along over the prairie, impeded by the ruts in the trail, and the numerous holes of the marmots, which infested that part of the prairie.

California Joe, as he passed the wagon at a distance of a hundred yards or so, on one side, hailed Jim Scott, who was driving the leaders, and called out:

"Mornin', Jim. Haow d'ye feel this mornin'?"

Jim's reply was a scowl, as he answered:

"You kin stick to yer old deacon, by gum; but he'd best look aout haow he comes raound aour camp, any more; fur we've got it in fur him. He's nigh killed dad, with his darned tricks."

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Joe, surprised at the tone of the man who had given in, the night before.

"The matter is that dad's got a pain in his side, and it's all that infernal skunk, that jumped on him," said Jim, savagely. "Don't ye come nigh hyar, Joe, ef ye don't want'er git plugged. It ain't no rough-and-tumble naow; but ye'll find aout more'n ye like, ef ye come too close."

California Joe was about to answer angrily, for the threat was all that was needed to inflame his hot young blood, when the deacon laid his hand on the young man's arm, and said, in a low voice:

"Tis not worth quarreling about, young man. I broke two of his ribs, and he hath cause to feel sore about it. Let us go on."

The words struck Joe as sensible, for he did not want to pick quarrels with men who had certainly

treated him with hospitality the night before, whatever their course toward the inoffensive stranger; so he rode on past the Scott wagon with his new companion, and soon had gotten far ahead, so slow was the progress of the heavily-loaded vehicles as compared with the progress of the two unimpeded men.

Thus they rode along for several miles, when Joe observed:

"Right smart little mule you've got thar, deacon. Carries a heap more'n one 'u'd give him credit fur."

Simplicity Fox nodded.

"Charity is a faithful beast, but she hath her faults, friend."

"Ay, and what's one of 'em?" asked Joe.

"She will allow no man to ride her, save myself," was the response of Simplicity.

Joe grinned.

"Waal, stranger," he said, "I call myself some on the ride, and never seen a mule or boss I c'u'dn't straddle as long as they stood up on thar legs. Reckin I kin ride that mule, any time, fur the rhino."

The deacon shook his head as he said, solemnly:

"Friend, thou talkest after the manner of the world. My religion forbids me to make wagers, after the fashion of the ungodly; but when we go into camp, thou shalt have a chance at Charity, if thou wilt."

Joe laughed.

"All right, deacon; we'll try it when the rest come up. You air a rum kind of a snoozer, anyhaow. To look at ye, one 'u'd think ye c'u'dn't melt butter in yer maouth, but ye kin fight like a streak. Is all the deacons in your church the same as you be?"

The deacon was trudging along beside the mule, with his eyes bent on the ground, as Joe spoke. He lifted them and cast a swift, suspicious glance at the tall Kentuckian, as he said evasively:

"Friend, I do not profess to be a fighter, or I should not be out here in the way I am. My creed is to live peaceably with all men, and do harm to none. Is thine any better?"

Joe colored slightly. He was a young fellow who had rarely been to anything in the way of church in his life, and like most Western men, thought but little of anything but the present.

But he had a respect for religion, like all of his kind, and it was quite respectfully he said:

"Waal, deacon, I ain't goin' 'raound pickin' quar'ls with no man; but I must say that, when I seen you fu'st, I thought you must be crazy."

"And why?" asked the other, turning his blue eyes mildly on the young man.

Joe hesitated.

"Waal, waal—'cause—'cause—ye see, thar's a heap of Injuns on the plains, they tell me, and you hain't got so much as a pistol about ye."

"True," was the tranquil reply, "and in that the time may come when thou shalt see that I was right and thou wrong. Of what avail would be all the powers of that rifle thou thinkest so highly of in the face of a war-party of the Utes or Cheyennes, when we come into their country? They would riddle thee with arrows, ere thou couldst fire more than one shot."

Joe looked at his long Kentucky rifle with a glance of half-sad, half-affectionate interest, as he said:

"I dunno but what ye're aabout right thar. I've h'ard a good deal aabout these new-fangled things they calls *Colts*, but I never seen one, and dunno ef I'd know haow to use 'em, ef I had one of 'em. Old Brownie, hyar, 's got to do me till I git to Californy, I reckon. She'll git game, anyhaow, and that's what I brung her for."

They were all alone as he spoke, in the midst of a sea of waving grass, the river-bottom being here many miles wide, and the grass so high as to cut off a great part of the horizon. Out of a little clump of bushes just ahead of them at that very moment jumped a deer, almost under the feet of Joe's mule, and was bounding off, when the Kentuckian threw his rifle to his shoulder, and, following the flying animal for a few bounds, his eye glancing along the barrel, fired.

The deer gave a lofty leap in the air as the rifle cracked, and then fell all in a heap, dropped in its tracks as neatly as the thing could have been done.

The deacon looked at the feat with a silent but approving air, as he remarked:

"Friend Joe, thine eye sees straight, and after thou hast been on the plains a little longer, thou wilt make a scout and guide."

Something in the tone struck Joe; for he cast his eyes on his companion, as he remarked:

"Why, deacon, to hyar you talk, one 'u'd think you'd b'en on them afore *yerself*."

Simplicity smiled, as he answered, tranquilly:

"Friend, thou art right. I have, or I should not be where I am now. Let us take up the deer and make the most of him, between Charity and thine own beast. We can take the most of the carcass to camp to-night."

They went forward to where the deer lay, and Joe, dismounting, took out his knife with the readiness of one who had performed the work many times before, and began the operation of skinning and disemboweling.

The first he carried no further than to make room for the last, and the carcass was cut in half, the hind-quarters and saddle being put behind Joe's saddle, while little Charity had the fore-quarters for her share of the load.

By the time they had made the arrangement, the Scott wagon was coming up fast in the rear, and the vehicle of Gabelle was catching up with it, as the horses toiled forward through the long grass, to-

ward the distant Kansas, which they had left at daybreak to cut off a curve, and which now glistened, like a silver thread, far before them, at a ford where the trail crossed the river, as it did several times in the course of the journey.

As the Scotts came up, they cast a curious glance at the game the hunters had secured; and Joe, thinking it a good time to make peace, called out to Jim Scott, who was driving the leading wagon:

"What's the use of growling over a fa'r fight? Hyar we've got a pile of good venison, and ef you want it, say the word. Thar's more'n we kin eat; try aour best."

The overture seemed not to be without effect, for the sulky look vanished from Jim's face, to a great extent, as he said:

"I hain't got nothen' ag'in you, Joe. Who shot the deer? Ef it were you, all right."

"Waal it *were* me, and no mistake," said Joe, and he patted the breech of his rifle affectionately as he spoke. "Old Brownie, hyar, ain't to be beat at a off-hand shot, and don't you furgit it, Jim Scott. When ye git a little further aout on the plains, ye may need her, and be sorry ye told me to go away."

Here the face of the elder Scott peered out of the front of the wagon, behind his son, and he querulously asked:

"Whar's that feller they call the deacon?"

"Here am I, friend," was the unruffled reply, as the deacon advanced near the wagon. "Truly I am sorry to hear that I hurt thee more than I had intended, last night; but thou, on thy part, must remember that thou didst threaten to tear out mine eyes, and that is a sad deprivation to a man in this wilderness."

Old Scott looked pale and haggard—all the fight taken out of him as he moaned:

"Waal, I got the wu'st of it, and naow, ef you're a minister, as you say you air, what air you gwine to do fur me?"

Simplicity Fox answered:

"He that hurts should be able to cure, on a pinch, friend. If thou hast abandoned thine evil designs, I am ready to help thee, and the air of the plains will do the rest. Where is the pain?"

Old Scott pressed his hand to his right side, with such a pale face and deep groan, that it was evident that he was not feigning.

"It's hyar—hyar, all raound thar. It cuts like a knife, when I draw a breath."

"Then let thy sons lift thee from the wagon, and we will go into camp by the river yonder. We can do no traveling till thou art out of pain, but the fracture is not serious."

The wagon was turned toward the distant river and soon approached the banks, where the camp was pitched, and the old farmer taken from his wagon and laid on the grass by the water-side.

His family gathered round him, staring at the strange figure of the deacon, with a superstitious awe that told how his conduct, the night before, had impressed them. There were in the Scott household, besides the mother, three daughters-in-law, wives of Tom, Jim, and Bob, with two of the Scott girls, proper, Martha and Lucinda; both hearty, fine-looking girls, with the fresh complexion of the mountains from which they had come, and the thews and sinews of Hebes.

These girls especially stared at the long flaxen locks of the deacon, with something very like admiration; for, now that he could be seen in daylight, he was a decidedly handsome man, in spite of his disfiguring dress.

In the midst of perfect silence, he examined the farmer carefully, and manipulated his side, amid groans of pain from the impatient old man, till at last he said:

"There, friend, the ends of the ribs are together now; but the patient needs perfect quiet. If he be moved for the next two weeks, he will not be able to heal the injury. You must make the best of it by camping in this spot. Luckily the grass is good, and from the look of the land, there is plenty of game to be found, all round here."

He spoke very coolly, as if the waiting spell he suggested was nothing out of the common, but old Scott at once said:

"Tain't possible, deacon. We hain't got more'n enough pork to last us to the maountings, and ef we don't stay hyar, I'll hev to be kerried somehaow."

Deacon Simplicity nodded.

"There is sense in what thou sayest, friend, and if thou art set on going forward, and art not so much incensed with me, for having hurt thee in my own defense, to disdain my help, I can show thee a way in which thou canst go forward, and be cured at the same time."

"How? how?" asked Scott, eagerly. "Tell me the way, and I'll give in that you're the best man at a rough-and-tumble I ever seen in my life—and that ain't a little from me, stranger."

A slight, contemptuous smile curled the lip of the strange deacon, as he replied:

"That is not much, friend. When the strength of the Lord is on his servants they can do wonders. Thou must be bandaged up by me and laid in the wagon again, while I show thee a smoother route than that by which the rest of the caravans go, which shall end in leaving thee safe and sound. The road by which I shall lead thee shall be one where thou shalt find peace and plenty, and I will deliver thee from the peril of the wilderness."

There was something in the way he spoke, and the expression of his countenance that struck the simple farmer with awe; for he was an ignorant man, like most of his kind—the crackers of the South—and he dropped his jaw, as he said:

"Why, stranger, hev you b'en hyar before?"

The deacon bowed his head.

"Friend, there is not a path in these plains, a pass in the mountains that I have not traversed till I know every blade of grass."

The Scott boys gazed on him with more awe than before as he spoke, and Jim Scott asked:

"Why, who in thunder air you then?"

The deacon raised his head, and a proud look illumined his face as he answered:

"What I am thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Enough that I alone can lead ye through the perils of the way. Will ye trust me, or shall I go? I can take my own path as I list, wherever the wild Indian rove, for he dare not lift his hand against me. The hand of the Lord is on me and my people, and we are safe in the den of lions."

Joe and the Tennesseans stared at this mysterious personage as he spoke, with something of fear; but the emotion faded away as the old man said, faintly:

"We've got to trust ye, stranger; fur ye've showed us ye kin whip all creation ef ye please. Take us whar ye will."

A smile of satisfaction illumined the pale face of Deacon Simplicity, and he made the bandages for the old man's ribs, in a deft way, that showed he knew a good deal of surgery.

Then the party went into camp for the afternoon.

CHAPTER V. THE MIDDLE PARK.

Two months after the time that the little caravan of the Scotts and Gabelles went into camp by the borders of the Kansas river, the same wagons were in the midst of the mountain ranges of the Sierra Madre, in the vast wilderness that now forms the State of Colorado, passing through the "Middle Park," and a long way beyond the site of the present city of Denver.

In front of the caravan rode California Joe, on his faithful mule; his long Kentucky rifle on the pommel of the saddle in front of him.

There was something in his whole air, as he rode along, which showed that he had changed considerably, since the day when he first came upon the plains, a green boy, with no knowledge of the life before him, save that common to any man, who has been a hunter.

There was a self-reliant look on his face; a dark bronzed hue on his cheek, that told of a man who has been in the habit of taking care of himself; and his glance traveled over the mountains round him, with the assured glance of one who knows where he is, spite of the strangeness of the scenery.

The wagons behind him were of the same rickety appearance they had when they first halted by the Kansas; and the little Gabelles looked about as dirty as they had done then. The only change in the equipment of the party was that there were several Indian ponies or bronchos, which they had picked up from vagabond tribes on the way, as they traversed the trail to the mountains.

California Joe was alone, in advance of the expedition, his eye roving over the landscape, and he was talking to himself, a habit he had grown into, in the solitude of the wilderness, being naturally very loquacious and ready to talk to himself, rather than have no listener.

"Joe," he was saying, "seems to me that if your ole dad seen you, now, he'd kinder think you was on a bad trail. Hyar we be, two months on the road, and not half-way thar, while the deacon wants us to go to another place altogether. I dunno what to think of it. He seems to know his biz, or he wouldn't ha' brung us all the way he has, and nary an Injun teched us; but thar's suthin' abaout that feller, that I'm gittin' to kinder mistrust. He talks too much religion fur a man that lives among Injuns, and he knows too much abaout thar ways."

The young hunter cast his eyes round him, on the great valley in which he was.

A lovely expanse of rolling grass, interspersed with clumps of noble trees, was surrounded, at a distance of nearly a hundred miles, by the lofty, snow-clad peaks of the great Sierra, which resembled a fortification thrown round the Park, to protect it from outside foes.

It had been a paradise for the Indian hunters but a few years before, but the great march of emigration and the establishment of forts in the vicinity had rendered it comparatively safe for the transit of large caravans of wagons, if accompanied by a force of at least two hundred men. Otherwise, it was thought that a party was likely to be snapped up by some roving band of Arapahoes or Cheyennes, who had their hunting-grounds in the Park from time immemorial, and regarded the white man with extreme jealousy.

Yet into this paradise of game and Indians, the little group of three wagons, with but seven men to defend it, including the mysterious deacon, had penetrated, without seeing an Indian so far; and California Joe was acting as guide to the caravan, though he had never been in the Park in all his life before—taking for his course a series of landmarks, which had been impressed on his mind by Simplicity the day before, when the strange being had left him, to go, as he said, "on a pilgrimage which he could not explain."

He had taken the small mule and ridden away in a deep wood, promising to return before morning, for it was night when he started, and had not yet come back; but he had told Joe that, in case he was detained by something he could not explain there would be no difficulty in finding the trail that was to lead to the land of gold by a short track, which he, the deacon, would guarantee as absolutely safe.

Now the sun was getting low, on the second day, and still there was no sign of Simplicity Fox. As Joe thought of all the difficulties that surrounded

him, and the people who were with him, a thrill of something very like fear came over him, for he remembered that they were alone in the Park, a hundred miles from the nearest fort, and that there were six women in the party.

The regular trail of the emigrants to California lay considerably to the south of the route the deacon had persuaded them to take, though of this the ignorant Tennesseans had not been aware; for none of the party, save Joe, had any idea of reading or writing, and the sight of a map was a mystery of mysteries to them.

Their only means of knowing that they had left the great trail was the fact that they missed the broad plain marks of the wheels that had made the thoroughfare of the emigrant trains a white road, like a "pike" in the Eastern States, save for its roughness.

But where they were none knew, and they were the more in the power of the deacon in that they were unacquainted with the use of the compass and had never been in that part of the plains before.

It was no wonder, therefore, that Joe felt decidedly uneasy, as he scanned the Park before him, which looked as if it had never been trodden by the foot of man, and then glanced back at the wagons and the faces of the girls, peeping out from the curtains in front.

The young hunter was, in fact, the only one of the party who was capable of appreciating the danger they were in; for he was the only one who could read and write, after a fashion, and he had brought with him, when he started from his home in Missouri, a map of the great trail, over which he pored in secret, when he could get a chance, unobserved by any one else.

Had he been asked why he did this, and especially why he took care that the deacon should not catch him at his studies, he would have found the answer hard to give. It was only since they had been in sight of the mountains, that he had begun to mistrust the deacon in any manner, and he had been trying to puzzle out for himself the place where he was, with a fair measure of success, since he had come among the peaks that were easily recognizable and laid down in the map.

The deacon had told him, a day or two before, that a certain lofty, snow-capped mountain, they had passed as they entered the Park was Long's Peak, and Joe had found that on his rude map, and was doing his best to make out where he was, by looking at it as he rode along. He had no idea of such a thing as scales, and his notions of distance, as represented on paper, were decidedly vague; but he saw that they were out of the regular trail, followed by the greater part of the emigrants on their way to the land of gold, and wondered where the trail they were following could lead them.

On his map he found only the white blotch which marks an unexplored region with the words "Great Desert" over it, and another blotch, shaped like a gigantic leech, with part of the outline lost in dots, which bore the inscription:

"Great Salt Lake, dis. 1843."

In common with everybody, however ignorant, in the United States, at that time Joe had heard of the Great Salt Lake as the center of a desert of sand, where no human beings could live; but there were rumors that the great Mormon Exodus, which had started from Nauvoo three years before, had gone in that direction, and that the pilgrims had halted there, as their refuge from persecution.

Joe had but a vague idea of the Mormons, save that common to the western men at the time, that they were a set of wicked wretches, who would kill any one who came in their way, and stick at nothing to get women into their community.

But the way they were going did not promise to lead anywhere near the lake of which he had heard such miraculous accounts, and poor Joe was puzzled what to make of the whole thing.

As he rode along, he was looking out for a place to camp, and when the sun was within about an hour of setting, he spied just the place he had been searching for, all the afternoon, a grove of trees that would afford ample shade, by the margin of a little babbling brook, bordered with flowers, while the presence of deer, in large quantities, and almost as tame as cattle, was shown at every turn of the way.

The young hunter took his course thither, and turned his mule loose, while he set up the end of a white towel, on a pole by the tree, to indicate to the wagons, when the drivers should get there, that he had chosen a spot for camp.

Then he went quietly off, through the trees, to stalk a deer for supper, and had almost got within gunshot of a herd of three or four, when he noticed the animals start, lift their heads from the grass, with a frightened air, and bound away for several yards, when they stood still, staring at something that they could see from where they were, but which was still invisible to Joe.

They did not seem to be alarmed so much as startled, and not long after Joe saw the cause of their start, in the figure of a man, coming forward from another grove of trees, mounted on a small mule, in which he recognized Chari.

It was Deacon Simplicity Fox, and he looked the same as ever, in his black suit, riding at a foot-pace, with his legs almost touching the ground on either side of the small mule.

CHAPTER VI. THE DEACON SPEAKS OUT.

As soon as the young hunter saw the deacon, he drew a long breath of satisfaction; for he had been very uneasy at the absence of their reverend guide; and the sight dispelled all these thoughts in an instant.

The deacon looked the same as ever, and rode on straight toward the tree, in front of which Joe had erected his white flag.

He cast a glance up the valley, where the white tilts of the old-fashioned Conestoga wagons were plainly to be seen and turned the mule that way, as if to take a better view. The young hunter, on his part, did not stir from his concealment, partly because he did not want to show himself to the deer, partly because he had a sudden notion to find what the deacon would do, when he was alone.

The strange man looked up the valley for a little space, and then rode to the tree where Joe's mule was feeding, where he unsaddled his own beast and lay down under the tree, as if to wait for the coming up of the wagons.

The deer, that had run to one side, out of his way, now came closer, as if in curiosity; and before long, Joe saw that one of them was within gunshot, from his own position.

Leveling old Brownie, he pulled the trigger, and the deer dropped in its tracks.

Peering through the smoke at the deacon, whom he expected to see start at the report of the gun, Joe saw that he had not shifted his position in the slightest; and muttering, "Well, he is a cool cuss," the young hunter reloaded his piece and stepped out of his concealment, advancing toward the deer.

It lay within fifty feet of the deacon, while the other animals had run off frightened at the sound of the gun.

Joe showed himself boldly and walked up to the deer, when he was saluted by the voice of Simplicity, saying in the most commonplace way:

"That was a good shot, friend Joseph; but if I had not known thou wert there, thou couldst not have had it."

"Why not?" asked Joe.

"Because they would have run up the valley, had I startled them. But the deer of this vale know me well, and fear me not."

Joe was puzzled again at the familiarity this singular man displayed with the scenery and characteristics of the wilderness.

"Why, deacon," he said, "ye talk as if ye knew 'em all. I've b'en kinder thinkin' whether we've come on the right track arter all, sence we've got inter this valley."

Deacon Simplicity cast a quick glance at him from under his eyelashes, with his blue eyes half-shut, that showed how sly he could look on occasion, a glance very different from the usual wide-open stare of his clear orbs.

Then he said quietly:

"Friend Joseph, there is but one thing to do in the wilderness, and that is to trust to thy guide. Thou art young yet, and hast thy way to make; but already I can trust thee alone to take a train a day's journey. I went away from thee on purpose to test thee, and thou hast done well. In a little while I may go away again for a longer time and before thou gettest to the land of gold, thou wilt be a plainsman and mountain-man, as well as the best of them."

Joe was flattered by the words of the deacon, and he said, earnestly:

"Deacon, ef I thought I c'u'd ever make a good guide, and be able to live on the perarer, the same as them fellers they tell about that follered Kit Carson, I'd feel I were all hunk. But ye don't think I could do it, do ye?"

"Not only do I think it; but I know it, friend Joe, and this I tell ye, that if thou wilt be content to trust thyself to my guidance entirely and go after the marks that I shall tell thee now, I am content to go away again, and trust thee to take the train along for another week."

Joe colored with pleasure.

"Would ye, reelly, deacon?"

"I would. I have business that I cannot explain that will take me away; but that need not make any difference to thee. Darest thou take the wagons on alone for a week more without me to guide thee?"

Joe hesitated.

"It's kinder resky, deacon, ain't it? I never were in these mountains afore, and mout make a mistake."

"I will give thee as plain directions as I did when I left thee before. Canst thou follow them as thou didst then? Thou hast come to the very place that I laid out for the camp of to-day."

"Reckin I kin, deacon."

The deacon brightened up at once, for he had been looking thoughtful and depressed when Joe first saw him.

The wagons were still some mile and a half from where they were sitting by the tree, and their approach was slow and tedious, for the mules were tired after the long trip.

The deacon pointed to the lofty cone of Long's Peak, and began to give his directions.

"Thou wilt keep that peak behind thee, as far as thou canst see it, till thou comest to a pass in the mountains, on the further side of this Park. Thou wilt know the pass when thou comest to it, by a mountain, cleft in twain like the saddle of a pony, on the right hand, and the way lies straight through that pass. When thou hast traversed that, thou wilt come to a lofty plain, with the tops of the hills all round it, save to the west, and thy course will be due west. In the morning thou wilt have the sun on thy back, and in the evening it will shine on thy face. When thou startest in the morning, be careful to take some objects before thee, in a line, in the direction thou wouldst go, and keep them in sight all day. If it comes to thee to travel at night, then take the north star for thy guide, and keep it on thy right hand as thou goest. On the straight trail thou wilt come to a river, which has fords at most places. The wagons will

cross it, without difficulty. Thou wilt keep on, over this plain, till thou comest to the mountains on the other side thereof, and wilt strike for a pass in the range, which is marked by all the mountains sloping off to the northwest and west. Travel along the foot of the chain, which thou wilt see, running from the east to the west, and when thou comest to a pass in an angle—a corner, where another chain of hills comes in from the south—I will be with thee. Dost thou comprehend?"

Joe, who had been listening intently, nodded. "Reckin I do, deacon."

"Then there is no more need that I should stay," said Simplicity, rising from his recumbent posture. "I will ride over to the wagons, and tell them that I shall go away for awhile."

"Hold on," interposed Joe suddenly. "See hyar, deacon. Why in thunder shed you be goin' off at all, naow, when we want ye wust? It don't look right, nohaow."

The deacon frowned slightly, and the face that had been so guileless in its expression grew dark as he said slowly:

"Friend Joseph, it cannot be that thou mistrustest me?"

"Waal, deacon, ef ye want to 'alk that way," replied Joe frankly, "I don't think it air the squar' thing, arter we trusted ye to guide us in this hyar desert, to leave us, fur a week at a time, and make a feller *quite* what's never b'en hyar before. It don't look right; that's all."

Deacon Simplicity listened intently to him, and his face cleared as he said, with his most winning smile: "That is different, friend Joseph. I will tell thee why I am going. All unknown to thee, there are dangerous foes around thee, who are watching thine every move. Their eyes are on thee now."

Joe started slightly, and looked round him, up at the mountains, ejaculating:

"Whar? whar, deacon? Whar air they?"

The deacon waved his hand.

"In all directions. Thou art not an old hand at this business as I am, and knowest not the keenness of sight of the red-man. There are in the foot-hills, in all directions, Indians on the watch for this train, and I am the only man that can save thee from them. That is why I am going away, all unarmed as thou seest, for they know me as a just man and belonging to just men, who have never wronged them."

"Then why," asked Joe, with the native shrewdness of his training, "did ye bring us hyar, deacon, when we mout' hev gone by the other trail, whar there ain't no Injuns?"

The deacon smiled in the same engaging way that he had shown all along till Joe had shown suspicion of him.

"I brought thee and thy friends hither, friend Joseph, that they might come to the promised land by a path that would be safe, under my guidance, though under that of no other save a man of my church. Trust me, and all will be well. Continue to show mistrust, and thou wilt force me to leave thee to take care of thyself and the women in thy keeping."

The words of the mysterious deacon made Joe more uneasy than ever.

"Look a-hyar, deacon," he said, rising, with a frown on his face that showed he was getting angry. "That ain't the squar' way to talk. Ef you hed told us this hyar we'd never hev come this way. It ain't the thing fur a white man to go consortin' with Injuns, and the man that does it ain't the man fur my company."

The deacon listened to him tranquilly.

"Then it is settled that thou wilt not trust the man that has brought thee through the wilderness, by a path that has given the animals food in plenty and has saved thee many a weary mile; is it?" he said.

Joe hesitated.

"I ain't goin' as fur as that, deacon. But I say you ain't actin' squar', and you know it."

He was standing by the deacon as he spoke, and not thinking of anything but what he was saying, the words of the other about Indians having set him to looking all over the valley to see if he could spy any sign of them.

Deacon Simplicity stepped up beside him, and laid his hand on the arm of the excited young hunter.

"Wilt thou listen to me a moment, friend Joseph?" he said quietly.

Joe turned toward him, and saw that the blue eyes of the other were fixed on him with a strange expression. Something in the glance subdued him so far that he said:

"Speak on, deacon. I'll listen."

The deacon pointed up the valley to a place where the foot-hills ran into the plain, the slope covered with woods.

"Thou seest that wood?" he remarked, with the same impassive air as before. "If I leave thee in anger, or if anything happens to me while I am with thee, there are a hundred or more of Indians in that wood, who will come out on thee at once, and I cannot restrain them. If I go from thee in peace, I can send them away, and the way will be safe, if thou followest the road I bid thee. What sayest thou? Wilt thou have peace or war? If it be war, here I am, unarmed, and thou hast a rifle. My life is in thy hand. Take it if it will please thee, but remember that the shot seals the doom of all thy party, and removes from thee thy only friend."

He stood by the young man, looking into his eye, with the same fearless glance as before, and Joe felt ashamed of his suspicions.

"I don't want to kill ye, deacon," he said, in a rather shame-faced tone. "But ye must allow ye hain't done the squar' thing by us, in not tellin' us about the Injuns till naow."

Deacon Simplicity smiled in a pitying way, that had its effect on the simple Kentuckian.

"And wherefore have I hidden it from thee? Because I knew that if it were to be told to the men in yonder caravan, their simple, silly natures would have taken fright, and they would never have come this way. But thou art not the same. Young man, I have marked thee well, and there is that in thee which will make thee a leader among men, if thou hast the wit and the courage that I think thou hast. Trust me, and when we meet again we will talk more of this matter. Thou art seeking thy fortune. I can make thee rich above thy wildest dreams, and put thee above princes, if thou wilt."

Joe stared at him, surprised; for it was the first time the other had spoken in such a strain to him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SCOTTS GET RELIGION.

THE deacon looked like one inspired, as he said what he did. His blue eyes blazed, and his air was that of a prophet, while the young hunter was awed in spite of himself, and asked:

"Why, what d'ye mean?"

The deacon paused and looked round him for near a minute, before he spoke.

There was, for the first time, an air of doubt about him, as if he hesitated to say what he wanted to.

At last, as if he had made his decision, he addressed Joe directly:

"Young man, thou hast come to the plains to get a fortune; is it not so?"

"Waal, yes, I did; but I don't see much chance of that," was the rather sober reply of Joe.

"And suppose I show thee the way to get one in less time than thou canst by going to the mines; a way in which thou canst be rich at once and honored by all; wouldst thou not be willing to take the way?" asked the deacon.

"Sartain I would, and I'd be a darned fool ef I wouldn't!" replied Joe, instantly.

"Then trust me, and within the month I will show thee the land of promise, where thou shalt eat and be filled, and have all that heart can desire. Do as I have bid thee, and when we meet again thou shalt know all."

The deacon walked off to his small mule as he said these words, leaving Joe staring after him as if uncertain whether he were awake or asleep. The hunter saw him saddle the mule and ride off, without having any notion of intercepting him, and the deacon rode down the valley, and disappeared in the very wood which he had told Joe was "full of Indians."

As if to convince the young hunter that he was not dreaming, but that the deacon had really the power he claimed, within a minute after he had become lost to sight the form of an Indian warrior, in full panoply, mounted on a spotted pony, made its appearance at the edge of the wood, where Joe could see it plainly, and stood there for the space of near a minute, when it retired into the wood; and the young hunter drew a long breath, muttering to himself:

"Lord have mercy on us! Who kin he be?"

Then he looked round for the wagons, and perceived, what had escaped his notice before, that they were in such a position, with regard to the place where the Indian had made his appearance, that no one in the wagons could have seen the hostile savage.

Then Joe realized the position he was in.

Six men, with several women to take care of, and a whole crowd of little children, were surrounded by Indians, and the savages were ready to pounce on them, at any time. The deacon could have taken no more effective method than he had, to show Joe how totally the caravan was in his power.

"Why didn't I shoot the darned cuss, while he was hyar under my rifle?" mused Joe aloud.

The answer rose to his lips at once:

"But ef he'd wanted to play traitor, he c'u'd hev done it, afore this. Mebbe he's true, arter all. Anyhaow, it won't do to tell the wimmin, or they'll git skeered to death, and we can't do nothin' to git out of hyar, but foller the trail he laid out."

Here the wagons came in full sight, round an angle of the woods that dotted the Park, and soon after Jim Scott rode up on a pony, of which he was very proud saying:

"Darned nice place to camp. That deacon is jest the best feller I ever see'd, for choosin' camps. See'd him along with yer, jest naow, Joe. Whar's he gone to?"

"Gone off ahead to make the road safe," replied Joe. "Say, Jim, don't ye feel kinder suspicious of him?"

Jim laughed. It was remarkable to Joe how the anger and suspicion that had formerly existed in the Scott family toward the deacon had vanished all of a sudden.

"Suspicious!" he echoed. "Why, Joe, what an idee, arter the way he cured father up. He's jest a rip-tearer, he is, and we'd trust him with all we hev in the world. I used ter hate religion, and that were what made me tackle him, the fu'st night we seen him; but when I faound haow he c'u'd handle himself, I seen *his* religion was kinder different from any I'd ever struck afore. Me and him done a great deal of talkin' about that, I kin tell ye, and so's the old man and the gals. He tells me as haow *his* church is over the maountings, beyond hyar, and that ef a feller j'ines the church, they take keer of him, and he don't need no more work, all the rest of his life 'cept what the rest does."

"Did he tell ye what kinder church it was?" asked Joe, puzzled.

Jim nodded.

"Why, yes, to be sure. It's what they calls the

Latter Day Saints, 'cause they say as haow the Lord sent a message to them, right out of the sky, and thar gwine to conquer the hull 'arth afore thar done. He tells me haow they hev a reg'lar city, aout in the wilderness, they call Deseret, whar every one's happy."

Joe scratched his head. To him all this was gibberish, for he had never heard the name of the great community that settled the Salt Lake district, and the jargon of the "Latter Day Saints" was strange to him. But there was something about him, so much shrewder than his simple "cracker" companion, that he could not help asking again:

"Air ye sure *that's* the name of the church, Jim? Air ye *sure* it ain't the Mormons?"

Jim colored furiously, and turned on his companion, asking:

"Who told you anything about them? That's what the wicked call 'em and the Gentiles; but *they* don't call tharselves anything of the sort. Thar the Latter Day Saints—that's what *they* are. And what's more, Joe, I ain't gwine to hyar any man say a word ag'in 'em."

Joe was puzzled and hardly knew what to do; so he changed his tack, and asked:

"And do you mean that you and the hull family is a-gwine to turn Mormons?"

"I tell ye, we ain't gwine to hyar 'em called no names!" cried Jim, angrily. "We're runnin' this machine, and ef yer don't like it, you kin take your old mule and git."

The wagons coming up just at this time interrupted the angry altercation, for Jim rode off to attend to the leaders, while Joe found himself alone, watching the rest.

He had noticed, during the journey from the Kansas, that the deacon had become very intimate with the Scotts, but had attributed that to the care he had taken of the man he had hurt so severely. At every camp, when Joe had gone to his couch, the deacon had sat up, talking with one or the other member of the family, and all that Joe had caught had convinced him that the deacon was talking religion.

Joe, though not by any means a bad fellow, had the dislike, natural to any young man of high spirits and strong frame, to the usual mawkish talk of the Methodist minister, which he had fancied Simplicity to be.

He had always kept away from the camp-fires at such times, and had thought nothing of the intimacy that was developing, save that the Scotts were "getting religion," as he called it.

What kind of religion it was he had never troubled his head to inquire; but now the murder was out, and even California Joe, rough and uneducated as he was, felt a thrill of horror at the idea of the family "turning Mormons"—the more so that he had but the vaguest ideas what the tenets of Mormonism were.

He knew that the Saints had been driven out of the States of Illinois and Missouri, in succession, for some unknown crimes, among the least of which the ignorant backwoodsmen counted murder and theft; but where they had gone he did not know; the exodus having taken place three years before, and the plains being yet, to a great extent, unexplored.

Full of doubt, and not knowing what to make of it, he sat apart from the rest of the people in camp, while they pitched the tents and made their fires, wondering what was to come of it.

The Scotts talked together in low tones, frequently glancing at him, in a way that convinced him that Jim was telling them the story, and at last the old man came toward him, as he sat by the bank of the stream, and said, in a wheedling tone:

"Say, Joe, what's the matter with ye?"

"Matter enough," responded the young hunter, gloomily. "Jim tells me the hull caboodle of ye is turned Mormons, and gwine to jine 'em."

"And what of that?" asked Scott, with a touchy manner that showed he resented the talk of the young man. "Hain't we got a right to think as we please?"

"No one said ye hadn't," said Joe. "But that ain't no church fur a man from Tennessee to jine; and you know it, Scott. D'ye want to hev more wives than ye have already?"

"And why not?" asked Scott, in the same way. "If my ole woman and the boys don't squeal, I don't see why you have anything to say about the matter, mister."

"Mebbe I haven't," responded Joe; "but ef you s'pect I'm gwine with ye, ye're mightily mistaken."

The old Tennessean scowled at him, saying:

"Mebbe you'd better keep sich talk to yourself, young feller. Say, did you ever hyar of the Angels?"

"The what?" asked Joe puzzled.

"The Angels of the Prophet," said old Scott, his lean yellow face turning a shade paler as he spoke the words. "Ef you *haven't*, mebbe you mout' better keep yer maouth still, till ye see 'em, or they mout' snatch ye bald-headed, in the shake of a lamb's tail. We're gwine to jine the Saints; and ef you don't like to go along with us, the best thing you kin do is to pull up stakes and git. That's talk; ain't it?"

Joe, not anticipating any trouble, had laid his rifle down by his side, and as he looked up, the old man had his hand on a revolver in his belt, which Joe had never seen there before.

"I mean what I say," continued Scott, in the same menacing tone. "The deacon, he's the captain of the Lord's host, and he'll let you know what's what, ef you give any sass to the Saints. Naow, which is it, young feller, peace or war?"

It was the second time Joe had heard the language of menace applied to him, and his blood rose as he surveyed the Tennessean.

But the native caution of his race made him keep down the angry retort which came to his lips, and the first spirit of the craft which was to make him a great scout and guide came to his help, as he said quietly:

"Why, it's peace, in coorse, Scott. I ain't no fool, to want to fight a hull camp. Put up yer shooter. We hain't got nothen' to quar'l about, as I know."

Scott looked doubtfully at him; for there was something in the ignorant, brutal nature of the farmer that made him hesitate at giving up the advantage he held, while he carried a revolver, and Joe was unarmed.

"That's all right," he said. "But don't ye be talkin' ag'in' the Saints no more, or it mou't be bad fur ye."

Then he turned away to his own fire, and Joe, with a heavy heart went to that of the Gabelles, whom he found already at their supper, with the philosophy of people who know little and care less for what is going on around them, if it does not affect their happiness for the moment.

The Gabelles had got into the habit of making their camp at a little distance from that of the Scotts, and keeping by themselves, chattering French to each other, and it was to them that Joe naturally turned for consolation, in his new trial.

He sat down by old Gabelle, who was superintending the cookery of a pot full of soup, and asked him in a low tone:

"Air you gwine to turn Mormon too?"

Old Gabelle did not turn his head, but kept on stirring the pot, and whispered, under his breath:

"*Chut! Tais toi.* Dey listen, all de time. No, I vill not, if I can help it; but, *mon Dieu*, vat can ye do? We are far away from de forts, and de Scotts are too many. Ve must go dere, and do as ve are made to do, or get keel."

"Have they told you that too?" asked Joe.

Gabelle shrugged his shoulders.

"Dey do not care to tell me mosh. But dat man dey call deacon, he is bad man. He vill keel any man dat get in his way. Did you not know it? He look as if he have no gun all de time; but he carry de pistolet under his black coat, and he gif von to Scott. *Gare a toi! Take care!*"

CHAPTER VIII.

A PROPOSAL IN FORM.

THE revelations of the Frenchman made Joe very uncomfortable, as he thought over them. He was all alone, as far as he himself was concerned; and had made up his mind to escape, but the fact that the poor Frenchman was in the same pickle, with his good-natured wife and all the children, made Joe pause, before he thought of going away from them. He had confidence that he could get off himself, at night, and probably find the fort, which he knew existed some hundred miles back on the trail, by traveling at night, when the Indians were not likely to follow him.

But to do so, would be to leave the children at the mercy of the Indians, hovering round the train, and he had too much faith in the merciless nature of the deacon to doubt that, if Joe left the caravan, the fate of its members would be hastened, whatever it was.

Why it had been spared so long for his sake, and what was the reason, he could not yet tell; but the way the deacon had spoken to him was kind, if not entreating, and there was some reason for the tone he had adopted.

Thinking over all these things, Joe whispered to Gabelle:

"Would ye dare to run?"

The poor Frenchman shuddered.

"No, *mon Dieu*, no. Dey would catch us. Did you not hear of *de Angels*?"

This was the second time Joe had heard the words, and he said:

"Yes, Jim told me of 'em but I never heard of 'em before. What do you know?"

Gabelle looked round timidly.

The Scotts were at work at their supper, and no one was looking that way.

"I tell you," he said, quickly, under his breath. "I do not know vat dey are; but dey keel all de mans de Prophet tell dem. Dey are on de track all de time, and no man can tell ven dey come."

"Are they Injuns?" asked Joe.

"I do not know; but dis I know, dat de deacon, as he call himself, is de 'captain of de host,' as dey call it. Oh, *mon Dieu*, dat ve nevair had seen him. It vas a bad day, and he vill nevair leave us, vile dere is women in de party."

Joe looked over at the other wagons.

"Do you mean that those women in there are gwine to become Mormons, all of their own free will?" he asked, incredulously.

Gabelle shook his head.

"Dey do not know yet. De deacon he tell de mans onlee, and tell dem to keep it from de wemens. Dey vill not know till it is too late, and dey are in de hands of de vat dey call *Angels*. Ah, *mon Dieu*, I call dem *diabls*!"

The poor man seemed to be overcome with the terror of the idea, and shook his head dolorously, as he went on stirring his soup.

Presently the hoarse voice of old Scott came from the other fire, calling out:

"Helloa, Gabelle, what air you sayin' to that man? Don't ye know he's a Gentile, and not one of us. You'd best keep your tongue from him. Ef he don't like the company he's keepin', he kin git up and git."

Gabelle shuddered, and answered, in the whining tone of one who fears to offend:

"Monsieur Scott, I vas onlee telling him how to

make de good soup, not'ing more, *parole d'honneur*. Vill you haf some? It is ready now."

Scott scowled.

"No, don't want none of your darnation French stuff. Give me a venison steak, and you kin have all the soup you like to make."

Then, to Joe, he bawled, in a tone of indescribable insolence:

"Come over, hyar, Gentile, ef ye want to have supper. If ye don't, then git aout of the camp."

Joe heard him, and the young fellow's blood boiled at the tone adopted. It was the first time that the Scotts had shown him the hostility the deacon had undoubtedly been instilling into them, by his artful counsels.

But the very insult, passed on Joe, made him all the more careful that he should not put himself into the power of his enemies, as the Scotts and the deacon now undoubtedly were.

Affecting to laugh at the tone of Scott, he rose, and came over to the fire, saying:

"Why, sart'ly, ef you want me to take grub with ye. Remember that I took my fu'st at your fire, over on the Kansas. I'm allers willin' to eat my share. But why in the dickens didn't ye tell me ye was goin' to turn Mormons? I ain't got the least objections to doin' the same myself."

The words seemed to make an instant change in the looks of the whole family of Scotts, for the old man growled in a mollified way:

"Oh, well, ef *that's* the way ye talk, I ain't got no objections nuther. But ye've got to *pass the orjeet*, the same as the rest of us, ye know."

"The what?" asked Joe, puzzled.

"What they call *the orjeet*—the trial, ye know. I dunno what it is, myself; but the deacon says as haow it's a terrible thing, and any man that goes through it, won't never go back on the church," said Scott, who, in his ignorance, wished to instruct the new recruit, and felt it difficult to explain the scripture phrases by which the deacon had pictured the initiation of the Mormon neophytes. "You shed have told the deacon ye was ready to j'ine, and he'd ha' told ye."

Here Joe, whose busy brain had been working at a scheme by which he hoped to get out of the toils he was in, observed:

"And haow d'ye know he didn't, Scott? I've b'en foolin' ye all this time to find ef ye was a reel Saint or not. I were talkin' to the deacon jest as you come up, and I s'pose ye don't know that's a hull grist of Injuns in the wood over yonner, where he went in. He give me the road fur the next week, and told me haow to find the pass whar we're gwine to see Deseret. Naow, arter this, I want ye to understand one thing, Mr. Scott, and that ain't two. I'm the guide of this aoutfit, and ef you don't behave civil like, *I'll leave ye*, to take keer of yerselves in the wilderness, and git out of the way of them Injuns as best ye kin."

His news produced an immediate effect on the Scotts, who had begun to think, in the religious exaltation produced on their ignorant brains by the wiles of the Mormon apostle in disguise, that they were able to take care of themselves in the wilderness.

"Oh, good Lordy! Injuns! Ye don't mean that, really, Joe, do ye?" asked the father, with a shaking voice.

"I do mean it, and ef ye doubt it, all ye've got to do is to go over to that wood, over yonner, and ye kin see fur yerselves," replied Joe, tranquilly. "I ain't partick'ler, myself, as to haow I'm killed; but they say the Injuns roasts all tha'r prisoners alive. I kin git up and git as soon as ye like, Mr. Scott, and you kin take keer of the gals, as you're a full-fledged Saint naow, and I'm only a *Gentile*."

The news of the presence of Indians had changed the spirits of the Tennesseans considerably. They had had no intimation of such a thing from the deacon, though he had told them often that his church exercised a great control over the tribes in the vicinity of Deseret.

Had he been present with them, they would have relied on him entirely to protect them; but he had left them, and California Joe was the only person who knew what had become of him.

So old Scott changed his tune at once, and said:

"I didn't mean nothen, Joe; but you talked ag'in' the church, and that riled me, ye know."

"Then, arter this, ye'd best leave them alone that knows more'n you do, or mebbe you'll git into the wrong hole," remarked Joe with much assumed virtuous indignation. "I'll have you know, Mr. Scott, that the deacon told me as haow he wanted me fur suthin', and it's my opinion he wants to make me one of them *Angels*, you was tellin' of, a while ago; and ef ever I git har, you'd best look aout haow you talk to me. *You hyar!*"

And Scott was so subdued by the rating he had got, and the fact that Indians were near, that he made no reply but a meek "All right," and went at his supper, while the young hunter went back to the fire of the Gabelles, and staid there, all the rest of the evening.

He noticed that, while he was speaking to the father of the Scott family, the women had been listening to the quarrel, and that they had the look of people who were hearing something new to them.

What they knew, if anything, of the purposes of their lords and masters, in taking them to the Mormon settlement, he did not yet know; but he had an idea that they would not take as kindly to the new dispensation as did the men.

Women have, or are apt to have, a slight prejudice against a plurality of wives, and the Scott women were probably no exception to the rule.

He sat at supper with the Frenchman, who seemed to be pleased at the way he had taken down the insolence of the ignorant crackers in the other camp,

and was talking idly of nothing at all, to distract his attention from brooding over his troubles, when one of the Scott girls—the best looking of the two, named Lucinda—came over to the fire, and asked him:

"Say, Joe, what's this we hyar about Mormons? I want you to unnerstand that we're jest as good as you air, ef you ain't a Saint, and that we don't want no one to interfere fur us. If it's the will of the Lord to seal us to the captain of the host, we're jest gwine to be *sealed*, and 'tain't none of your business. Thar!"

This was another mystery to Joe, who had never heard the word "seal," used in the Mormon connection, before. And moreover he had been rather sweet on Lucinda herself at times, and the tone of the girl hurt him.

"Why, Miss Lucindy," he said, looking up, "I didn't go to say nothen' disrespectful to you, of all people in the world. I dunno what you mean by bein' *sealed*, and ef the deacon wants to *seal* ye all, he's welcome, I'm sure."

Lucindy seemed to be slightly mollified by this speech; for there was a tone of coquetry in her voice as she said:

"In course, ef there was *any one else* more like what me and sis thought we'd *prefer*, we'd *hev a choice*. The deacon told us *that*. But you'd have to j'ine the Saints, and go through the *orjeet*, the same as the rest of us."

Here was an advance with a vengeance, but Joe did not know what she meant, in his ignorance of the Mormon jargon.

"Waal, Miss Lucindy," he said peaceably, "I ain't got nothen' to say ag'in' the sealin'. Ef you want me to git sealed, I s'pose I'll have to git it done."

Miss Lucindy colored slightly as she arranged the strings of her sun-bonnet.

"I dunno as I oughter say *that much*, Mr. Joe; but ef you was willin' to take good keer of us, and promise we shouldn't be parted, me and sis, we kinder thought it mought be a good arrangement. Ye see the deacon's a mighty nice man; but he ain't what ye call *our kind*, and then they say he's got more'n he kin attend to, and he ain't over anxious to git sealed to no more, jest naow, so he says; and, ef you're agreeable, I'll tell Mat, and we'll git the sealin' done, as soon as we git to Deseret."

Joe, still innocent of what she meant and in the supposition that the "sealing" was some religious ceremony, which he had made up his mind to grin and bear, till he could get a chance to escape, merely said:

"Very well, Miss Lucindy, then that's settled."

And with that he turned to his faithful pipe, without which he never was happy, even at that early date, and began to fill it, while Miss Lucindy went off to the fire of her own family, and he saw her talking to Martha Scott, while the expression of the whole family altered for the better toward him.

But the stars were out by this time, and California Joe saw that it was time to get to his watch, if indeed there was any use in watching, when he knew the camp was in the power of the Indians at any time they chose to come out on the occupants.

He removed his old mule a little distance from the fire, to a place where it would be sheltered from the light, and he could keep a watch on the wood where he had seen the Indian.

For a long time anxiety and suspense kept him awake, but at last nature triumphed, and he slept soundly, not to wake till the rising sun warned him it was time to break up the camp, safe as yet.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST INDIANS.

A WEEK had passed since the night when Joe and the Scott caravan went into camp in the Middle Park, and the little trio of wagons had halted again, a hundred and twenty miles further on, by the banks of a stream of which no one knew the name, at the foot of a range of mountains which ran from west to east.

They were on the south side of this range, and had come to a place where it ran into another range, that came in from the south, and formed an angle, at which a pass existed, marked by a curious cleft hill, like a saddle, as the deacon had told Joe when he left him.

No Indians had been seen on the road, since the time when Joe had seen the warrior come out to show himself; but the young hunter, green as he was, had become convinced that the caravan was being followed and watched by some one, though the thick-witted Tennesseans had no idea of the fact, and were congratulating themselves that the deacon had saved them from the Indians.

But Joe, all un instructed as he was in prairie lore, had a good head and a good pair of eyes, and had not left his opportunities unimproved, while he had been on the road from Kansas.

He had learned to distinguish the track of a ridden horse from one that was running wild, and had noticed many tracks on the trail, as he rode ahead of the wagons, which he thought must come from Indians.

He had already found out that wild horses, of which there were still many on the plains, had the habit of roaming along at a walk, in an irregular mass, frequently stopping to feed, while ridden horses were apt to go in files, and at a faster pace. More than once, on the road from the Middle Park, he had come on a feather, dyed of a different color from nature, and knew that it could only have come from the head-dress of an Indian.

The savages, whoever they might be, did not seem to have taken any trouble to hide their signs, and Joe concluded that they traveled in this careless way, on purpose to let him know that they were around.

That the deacon exercised control over them in some way was plain, but what was the nature of the influence he could not yet tell.

As he brought the train to a halt by the stream, he hoped that the suspense would be ended by the appearance of the deacon, who had promised to meet him there.

During the journey thither he had had many conversations with the Scotts, and had learned from them much of what the deacon had told them of the tenets of the Mormon religion, as far as their ignorant minds could explain it to the young man.

He had heard all about the miraculous discovery of the Book of Mormon by the first Prophet, and the cruel persecutions to which the early converts of the new faith had been exposed in the various homes to which they successively fled, till they had attained the wilderness, where no man could disturb them.

He found that the only doubter in the camp, in the Scott family, was the mother of the whole tribe, who being an old woman and set in her ways, could not yet see the propriety of her husband taking to himself another wife, if he pleased. Her husband, on the contrary, was full of the patriarchal arguments in favor of the institution of polygamy, and talked with an unction that would have done credit to a better educated man, of the advantages that would flow from its practice.

Joe kept his mouth shut as to argument, and listened to all that was said; for he had determined to deceive those who had deceived him, and his quick wit told him that to do so, it was necessary for him to know the ground he was to traverse. He found out the meaning of the word which had puzzled him so much, as to being "sealed," and appreciated the bribe that would be offered to him if he would join the Church of the Latter Day Saints.

In this frame of mind he saw the camp pitched by the stream, and wandered off to find some game for supper, for there had not been much visible during the last day's march.

The face of the country had changed, and the grass was scanty, with patches of sterile sandy ground as they neared the mountains, that foreshadowed the desert to come.

The only animals seen during the day had been the large sage hares, that fed on the sage grass, the only vegetation to be seen, and the water had been growing steadily worse and worse all through the journey, on account of the strong alkaline nature of the soil.

The river to which they had come was the first exception to the rule, and the animals of the caravan had drank it greedily.

Joe went off toward the foot-hills, where he saw some timber at the mouth of a ravine, and before he had got within a quarter of a mile of the place, saw several black-tailed deer come out at a gallop, frightened by the sight of his horse, when they stopped to stare.

He had an advantage in the fact that to get to the open plain they would be compelled to pass him, and the animals seemed to realize the same fact, for they did not attempt the passage. Joe had never seen a black-tail before, and the beauty of the animals astonished him.

For a few seconds they stood staring at him, and then the leading buck turned and made for the mountains—just too late.

Joe, who had always been a quick shot, had taken a sight at the animal as it stood for that fatal moment, and had the satisfaction of seeing it drop in its tracks, in the act of turning, when the rest of the herd vanished.

Joe went up to the carcass and had begun to cut it up, when his mule, that had become the best of all guards to him, uttered a frightened snort and began to tug at the lariat by which he had fastened it to the horns of the deer which he was skinning.

Joe had become so accustomed to relying on the senses of the animal that he immediately rose and took his rifle, while he peered round.

He saw nothing, but the mule continued to snort and snuff the air, staring wildly in a direction which Joe, following, ascertained the cause of the animal's terror.

Coming down on him from the windward side, in a ravine of the range, was a party of ten or twelve Indians in full panoply, riding at a walk and in full sight.

They had just turned the angle of a rock when he saw them, and the leader bore a red pennon on the end of his lance.

Joe, for a moment, had an idea of taking flight; but he knew it would be useless, for the Indians had seen him, and his mule was too slow to run from their swift ponies.

He therefore took his post by his mule and waited for them to come up, which they did with no sign of hurry till they were within a hundred yards, when the young hunter leveled his rifle over the back of his mule, using the animal for a shield, and called out:

"Stop thar! No nearer, ef you don't want to git your hides plugged!"

Whether they understood his English or not, the action was one of a kind which a man in any part of the world would have appreciated.

The effect of the gesture was to cause an immediate halt of the party, and the leader waved his hand and called out something in a strange tongue, which Joe did not understand, but which he took, from the gesture that accompanied it, to mean that the Indian was peaceably inclined.

But Joe was too wary to be deceived by any tokens of peace into letting the Indians get near enough to strike, and he had heard, when he met an old trapper, near the Kansas, in the earlier portion of the journey, that Indians will always hesi-

tate to charge a man with a full gun, when they will rush on him at once if the rifle be empty.

So he kept his position, and the Indians seemed to appreciate the strength of his position, for they made no hostile movement, but drew off to a little distance, when the leader rode out alone, having left his lance behind, holding his hand up, with the palm to the front, in the signal of amity of the plains tribes, which even Joe could understand.

The young hunter was puzzled what to do, but he concluded that the Indian wanted to talk to him and engage his attention, while the rest would steal in on him.

He allowed him to get within about ten feet, when he leveled the rifle again, and called out:

"That'll do! Stop thar, Injun!"

And the red-man obeyed the order, with a suddenness that showed he understood English, while he said:

"No shoot, no shoot. Injun want talk."

"Talk away, then, but keep yer distance," said Joe sternly.

The savage seemed at a loss what to say, and his hesitation increased as he tried to make himself understood.

"You white man," he said slowly. "Me friend of Saint—you know Saint—me come—Saint."

"I dunno what ye mean," said Joe obstinately.

"Who sent ye to me?"

"Man—you call—deacon," said the Indian as plainly as he could.

Joe was a little surprised.

The savage pronounced the word correctly, but the hunter was still suspicious as to his designs, so he asked him:

"What did he say to you?"

The Indian seemed to be struggling with his ignorance of English, but he managed to get out:

"He—say—he—come—when—sun—so high."

He pointed to a part of the heaven where the sun, which was then within about two hours of setting, would be, when it came to its couch for the night.

"Very well," said Joe curtly. "Then, the sooner you git up and git, the better fur you."

And as he spoke, he pointed the rifle so fair at the Indian's head, that the savage, who had no weapons but a bow and arrows, neither of which was in hand at the moment, wheeled his horse and galloped away, with every sign of confusion and fear.

Then Joe saw him speak excitedly to his comrades and the next minute they uttered a yell, as if they were angry at the way he had been treated, when the whole party came tearing down on the young hunter—the first time he had ever seen such a charge—at full speed; their round white shields clattering against their lances, the feathers of their head-dresses streaming in the air behind them.

Joe waited for them with a fast-beating heart, for it was the first time in his life that he had ever been in a fight, and the novelty of the position was enough to dismay and confuse a man of more experience than himself.

But he kept repeating to himself the old trapper's warning, *not to fire too soon*, and kept his weapon leveled over the back of the mule, the black tube pointing at the Indians.

With wild yells they dashed down, as if to overwhelm him; but, at the sight of the deadly tube, swerved off to one side, and passed by him, diving over the sides of their horses as they came within gunshot, and dashing by at a distance of less than fifty yards.

As they passed, Joe heard the whistling of arrows, and several shafts fell all round him, the points sticking in the ground, but none of them actually hitting him.

Then the Indians rose up on their horses again, and swept off at full speed toward the wagons, yelling more wildly than before, and Joe expected to see them dash into the camp.

That the Scotts were scared, too, was evident from what he saw of them. They all rushed into the little corral that they had got into the habit of making every night, with the three wagons, in the form of a triangle, and the sharp reports of rifles came to his ears, while the Indians swerved from the flashes of the weapons, and went scudding off down the valley.

But they soon came back on Joe, who was now separated from the camp by a distance of about a quarter of a mile, and in danger of being cut off. That the Indians realized this state of affairs as well as himself, was apparent, from the way in which they came tearing back after him as soon as the attack on the wagon had failed of its success.

CHAPTER X.

THE DESTROYING ANGELS.

THE young hunter gave himself up for lost as the savages swept down on him for the second time, for there were twelve of them, and he was all alone. The method of their attack had also changed, for they no longer dashed at him from the front, as before, but began to circle round him in single file, at a gallop, shooting their arrows at him, and trying to draw his fire on one of their ponies.

Joe was so much possessed with the idea that they would get him at last, as they kept up their hideous yelling, and sent the arrows closer and closer at every discharge, that he began to get confused, and had thoughts of rushing out to meet his fate in hand-to-hand fight.

He was saved by the sudden appearance on the scene of no less a person than the mysterious deacon himself, no longer in the solemn black that had hidden his true character so

long, but attired in a gorgeous habit of scarlet cloth, covered with gold lace, that resembled the gala costume of an Indian chief.

He came galloping up on a magnificent horse, covered with the spots that showed Indian blood, and was followed by a number of horsemen—all white men—who wore wide hats of gray and a sort of uniform, while their belts were loaded with arms, and they had the appearance of being desperate men from the expression of their faces.

No sooner had these men made their appearance, headed by the false deacon, than the Indians, who had been circling round Joe, quit their little game and drew off, as if well known to the new-comers, while the deacon rode up to Joe, as the hunter stood behind his barricade and called out, in stern tones:

"Young man, what meaneth this? Did not the Canaanite deliver my message?"

Joe stared at him in his new glory, and could not but confess that the Mormon chief looked, now that he had come out in his true character, every inch a man and a warrior.

His long locks were waving under the shade of a broad white hat, in which was set a plume of the brightest blood red, which seemed to be a symbol of authority.

He wore a sort of open jacket of scarlet and gold, with broad, Mexican-shaped trousers of the same color, and a fanciful white shirt, covered with ruffles, under the jacket.

The gleam of precious stones from the bosom of the shirt showed that the deacon, so sober when among Gentiles, could be as great a dandy as any man, in the midst of his own familiars.

Joe was holding the fort—that is to say, the side of his mule—with the grim expression of a man who has made up his mind to die at his post, and the dauntless young fellow hailed the enemy sternly:

"Stop thar, ef ye don't want a hole bored in ye. Ye kin kill me, arter; but I'll drop you fu'st."

And, as the deacon was in full sight and had not even taken the precaution to draw a weapon, the Mormon chief halted.

With an act that was not entirely easy, he cried out to Joe:

"Young man, what meaneth this? Knowest thou that these are the Destroying Angels of the Lord and that I am their captain?"

"I dun'no and I don't keer," was the reply, as Joe kept his piece leveled on the deacon. "I know this, that those Injuns wanted to git me; but nuther they nur you don't do it, 'thout a fight. So come on, with all yer darned Angels, ef ye want to git wiped aout."

Deacon Simplicity compressed his lips as he looked at the dauntless youth behind the mule. He knew enough of human nature to be aware that, if he went on, Joe would shoot, and he knew that the aim of the young Kentuckian was singularly accurate. Making discretion the better part of valor, he said blandly:

"It is enough. We mean thee no harm. It was but to test thy courage, that I sent the Canaanites before me. Thou hast done well. Now come from thy post and surrender to the Lord's forces, or it will be the worse for thee."

Joe shook his head.

"Not by a darned sight, deacon. I've b'en fooled too often. Haow am I to know that, ef I come aout, you won't tell them fellers to shoot or hang me on sight? Ef that's got to be did, I want to know it, and hev a little fun fu'st."

The deacon turned round to his men, and the expression on his face changed to one of stern decision, as he called out:

"Brethren, let Gabriel and Uzziel advance, and take that ungodly man from his place."

Two of the Mormons—big, savage-looking men—as soon as they heard the order, put spurs to their horses and were about to ride recklessly in, when Joe leveled his rifle at the deacon and called out:

"Order 'em back, or ye die!"

His tone was so unmistakably that of a resolute man that the deacon saw he meant what he said, and raised his hand, when the two Mormon "Angels" pulled up, with their pistols drawn, their stern faces frowning at Joe, but obedient to the slightest signal of their chief.

Then the deacon called out:

"What is it thou wishest, rash man? Be-think thee that, if a hair of my head is hurt, thou and all these will be killed without mercy!"

"And bethink you," retorted Joe, "that, ef those fellers don't git back, I'll settle your hash fur one. That's talk, ain't it?"

The deacon looked puzzled.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "I tell

thee that we do not mean to hurt thee. What will satisfy thee on that point. Young man, if I wished to hurt thee, I could have done it at any time during the journey. Give up thine arms, or it will be the worse for thee."

Joe was staggered by the way the other spoke, for the air of the deacon had all the dignity of one used to authority, and his presence was that of a king.

The deacon saw the change in his face, and added, in a kindly tone:

"Thou hast stood the test well, and showed thou hast all the courage I expected in thee. Now show thou canst obey, and it will be well for thee."

Joe hesitated a moment, and then called out:

"Will you tell those fellers to go back aout of gunshot and come to me alone, deacon? I'll give in to you, when I wouldn't to a dozen or a hundred."

The deacon nodded and waved his hand, when the whole party of men with him turned their horses and rode away, without exhibiting the slightest impatience or reluctance to obey any order. When they had gone some distance, Joe waved his hand, threw his rifle to one side, and called to the deacon:

"Now, then, deacon, come on; and ef it's peace, it's peace; ef not, war be it."

The Mormon chief immediately rode up to him, leaped from his horse, and held out his hand to Joe, saying, as if much pleased:

"Young man, thou hast stood the test well; thou art worthy to join the Angels of the Lord, and ride in the band of the Destroyer."

Joe took the hand, but without any cordiality, as he answered:

"That's all very well, deacon; but why didn't you tell me you was in the Mormon church? Am I sich a darnation fool that ye c'u'dn't trust me, when ye let them lummixes of Scotts inter the secrets. Ye hain't treated me squar', sir, and ye know it as well as I do."

The deacon flashed a swift glance over him, and his eye gleamed with a singular expression. He seemed to be taking Joe's individuality in, and counting over just what he was worth.

Then, with a smile, he said:

"Young man, I had a purpose in that, which thou shalt know now. Did I not say to thee that I would meet thee here, and tell thee of the mysteries that thou couldst not understand?"

"Ay, ye did," replied Joe slowly.

The deacon interrupted him eagerly.

"And the time has come. Why did I not tell thee what I told the Scotts? Because thou art different from them. In thee I see the mind and courage that makes the chiefs of our church, while they are but the herd that we drive to and fro, like cattle. I have told them nothing but what we tell the ignorant in every land; but to thee, if thou art worthy, will be committed the secrets of the church, which they will never know. Young man, thou knowest, now, who I am; but not all. Thou knowest I am a Mormon, but that is not all. I am chief of the band of the Destroying Angels, and if thou hadst flinched, for so much as the space of a flash of lightning, these my men would have slain thee, as if thou hadst been a wolf. But thou art one of the men that we need; for we are against the world, and the world is against us. Say the words. Wilt thou join the forces of the Lord, or wilt thou die? for that is the choice I offer thee. Thou art too bold and wise to be lost in the herd of the great congregation, and to let thee go is not safe for any of us. Thy decision?"

He had begun in a pleading way, as if to wheedle the young man into compliance, but he ended by suddenly pointing a pistol at Joe, and putting the question in his sternest tone.

And, for the first time in his life, Joe found himself looking down the muzzle of a pistol, while his own rifle was resting with the butt on the ground, not in condition to be used before the deacon could shoot him.

The young man curled his lip, and simply said:

"Shoot, and be darned to ye, then."

For a moment it seemed as if the deacon was about to take him at his word; for his face darkened. Then he suddenly put up the pistol, and said to Joe:

"It is the last test, and thou hast stood it. Give thy decision now, without fear. Wilt thou join the Saints of the Lord, or not?"

The moment the other assumed that tone, the heart of Joe melted within him, and he said, in his frankest tones:

"Deacon, you're a man, and I'd made up my mind to do what ye wanted me; but I warn't the man to be skeered into it. I'll j'ine yer church ef ye want me, and ef ye want me to

ride with ye, I'll be proud to do it, and I'arn the ways of the plains."

The deacon nodded as if he were highly pleased, and took the hand of the young man in his own.

"Young man," he said, "thou hast decided wisely, and great shall be thy reward. Thou shalt yet be a prince among men, and thy children shall call thee blessed. The die is cast. I welcome thee to the church of the Latter Day Saints."

So saying, he turned and made a signal to the Mormons, who had halted at a little distance, and they immediately set up a yell and came tearing down at full speed, firing their pistols over the heads of the deacon and Joe, so that the bullets flew in alarming proximity to the pair.

"Fear not," said the Mormon chief calmly, as Joe frowned slightly, suspecting treachery. "'Tis but another test. Thou shalt not be hurt, if thou showest no fear."

He left Joe as he spoke, and the Destroying Angels swept down on the young hunter like a horde of hungry wolves, with a ferocity that would have shaken the nerve of most men.

As soon as the deacon had got out of the line of their fire, they dashed down on Joe, and fired shot after shot at him, so close that his hat was knocked off, and he expected every moment to feel the sting of the next bullet on his body.

There were at least a hundred of them, and they seemed to be all good shots, from the way they fired at him, circling just as the Indians had done before them.

Then the coil of a lasso was thrown over his head, and he was jerked off his feet, the noose wrapped round him, pinioning his arms close to his sides; in which condition two men caught him, as he lay, half stunned by the shock, and, before he had an idea of what was going to be done, had clapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists, and cast a rope round his ankles, till he was as helpless as a trussed turkey.

Then they swung him up on a horse, before one of the number, and he was carried off full speed, not knowing where he was going.

Before the horses had gone a dozen steps, the voice of the deacon was heard crying:

CHAPTER XI.

THE INITIATION.

"PUT out the eyes of the accursed one," cried the voice of the Mormon chief; and, with the word, several strong hands clutched the helpless Joe, and he was suspended between two horses, when a lance-pole or something of the sort was thrust between his elbows and body, and he was left hanging there, in a way that hurt him considerably, and left him more helpless than before. Then some one rode up behind him, passing between the horses of his bearers, and clapped a loose woolen cap over his head, which came down over his eyes and completely blinded him, when he was borne forward at a more furious pace than before, convinced, this time, that the deacon had deceived him, and that he was going to be tortured to death.

The pace of the Destroying Angels now became furious, and the way in which Joe was slung in the air between two horses was so painful that he had much ado not to shriek with the torture; but he set his teeth hard, with all the resolution of a Kentuckian, and stifled every cry, till the agony overcame his senses and he fainted away, only dimly conscious of the fact that he was being jostled to and fro unmercifully.

At last came a halt, and he woke up to find himself lying on the ground on his face, the pole on his back, where he lay, helpless, while a confused sound of voices round him showed that the men were holding some sort of a consultation above him.

Then the voice of Deacon Simplicity Fox said:

"Open his eyes, that he may see."

With that, some one came to the poor fellow where he lay, and withdrew the pole from behind his elbows, when he was rolled over on his back, and the cap was pulled off his face.

For a moment, the change, from darkness to comparative light, blinded Joe, but the sun had set, and the twilight only lingered on the tops of the mountains round him, so that he was soon able to see clearly around.

He found himself in a narrow ravine, while the Mormons were lighting fires round him.

They had dismounted from their horses, and were engaged at the various occupations of making camp, while the deacon and a group of three or four men, who wore red plumes in their hats, were directing the operations.

Joe felt stiff and sore after his ride, and his strength seemed to be taken from him for the time, while the Mormons took not the smallest notice of him, as he lay.

Among the rest he did not fail to see the Indians who had first assaulted him in a camp apart from the rest, with their horses picketed in a green spot, while the warriors were seated on the grass, eating dried corn, which they took from their little sacks, carried on a march.

In spite of his cramped and painful position, Joe could not help feeling a great interest in what he saw, for it was his first opportunity of seeing with his own eyes the scenes of which he had dreamed when he first came on the plains.

He had had a great ambition to be a scout and warrior, and to find out the ways of the Indians, and here they were, right before his eyes, in a place where he had an opportunity to see what they did, without their suspecting his object.

He had a good opportunity to look round him, and saw that the camp of the "Angels" and their Indian allies was secured from assault by a line of sentries, whom he could see dimly outlined in the twilight. The guards were pacing to and fro at the other end of the ravine in which the camp was laid out, and the rest of the men worked as if they felt perfectly secure.

He watched the Destroying Angels closely, for there was no one to hinder him.

He saw that they seemed to be picked men for height and size, averaging six feet, and all of them powerfully built.

They were armed to the teeth, every man having a pair of revolvers in his belt, and a rifle of a kind that Joe had never seen before. It was the then recently-introduced breech-loader of the Sharpe's variety, and the young man had heard of its marvelous efficacy, but had never seen a specimen.

Its superiority to his own weapon was illustrated to him by chance, as one of the men near him opened the breech of the rifle and drew the charge, which he put into the pouch at his belt in a way that Joe had never seen before, while he took out the breech apparatus and oiled it carefully, when he reloaded the weapon in two seconds, and remarked to one of his friends in Joe's hearing:

"Reckin the Canaanites won't hev much chance at us arter this, brother Uzziel."

He spoke to a tall man, with long red hair, that flowed down over his shoulders like the mane of a lion, on either side of a bearded face of severe gravity.

Brother Uzziel replied with a frown:

"The Canaanites are not the foes of whom the host of the Lord is afraid. 'Tis the Gentiles that are coming nearer all the time, that we have to sweep with the besom of the Lord. Verily the time is nigh at hand."

Joe did not yet understand the figurative language adopted by the Mormons; but he saw that his captors were uneasy, and that his own person was a matter of small importance to them, compared with something else that was going on near them.

What that could be he knew not, but he trusted to the operation of time to tell him, and tried to make the best of his uncomfortable position by staring round him and listening.

After an hour or more passed in this way, the camp of the Mormons quieted down, and the men were gathered round their fires, eating their suppers, which seemed to be as frugal as those of the Indians, though the chiefs—as Joe took the men with the red plumes in their hats to be—ate venison steaks, which were broiled on the coals for them by the men, and brought to them with every demonstration of respect.

In fact, the discipline of the band of "Angels" seemed to be of the most slavish kind; for the rough warriors, bristling with arms, served their chiefs on bended knees, with bared heads, and obeyed the slightest gesture with an eagerness that would have been ludicrous, had it not been so evidently inspired by awe.

At last the supper was over, and no one had come near Joe, when the deacon turned his head, as he sat within hearing of the young prisoner, and said audibly:

"Bring the Gentile before us, that he may be questioned."

Two stalwart Mormons immediately strode toward Joe and lifted him to his feet, when one of them stooped and cut the cord that bound his ankles and said roughly:

"Arise and walk, young man. The chief requires thee to answer for what thou hast done."

Then he was helped forward to the fire, around which the chiefs were seated, and left

there, hardly able to stand, for the stiffness and pain in his limbs.

Then the Mormon chief raised his eyes; the chiefs who were with him did the same, and stared at Joe with a steady, unwinking gaze that awed the prisoner.

Joe tried to brave it out, but his eyes sunk, in spite of himself, before the gaze which he met; at which the Mormon leader smiled slightly, and broke the silence, which was becoming oppressive, by saying:

"Well, Gentile, what hast thou to say?"

The other chiefs said not a word, and Joe's guards stood silently by, with their hands on his elbows to support him, in case he should fall.

The young hunter flushed as he answered, in a voice that trembled in spite of himself:

"What d'ye want me to say, sir?"

"Tell us what was thine intention in coming to this place, sacred to the Saints of the Lord; and thou but an unclean Gentile?" asked the other slowly.

Joe threw back his head.

"Why did I come? That's a queer question for you to ask, deacon, when you were the man who gave me the route, and told me how to come. I come 'cause you told me."

"And in so doing, thou hast done well. But I ask thee again, why didst thou come at all to the plains?"

"To make my fortin, ef I could," replied Joe.

The deacon nodded his head slowly.

"It is well. But now thou knowest that this is the Lord's land, and that we are the Saints of the Lord, what is thy wish?"

Joe hesitated a moment. He knew that there was some test in the apparently fair question; and he answered, in the spirit he had resolved to show:

"I want to j'ine your craowd, ef ye'll let me, deacon. It seems to be a pretty good one."

The deacon frowned, and the chiefs did the same, as the leader said, in his sternest tones:

"Young man, thou knowest not what thou sayest. Dost thou know what it is to join the army of the Lord, and to do the acts that we do?"

"No, I don't," said Joe, boldly; "but I hain't see'd the man yet, in your crowd, that I couldn't tackle, and I ain't afeard but what I c'd hold my own with the best of 'em."

His answer seemed to please the deacon and the men who were with him, for their faces softened somewhat.

Fox inclined his head.

"If that is thy spirit, it may yet be well. But knowest thou the vow that these men are obliged to take on them, to become the Destroying Angels of the Lord?"

"No, I don't," said Joe.

"They swear to obey *all* orders, coming from the captain of the Lord's host and his officers, no matter if to do so is to kill the man who obeys the order. Canst thou take that vow on thyself?"

"I kin," said Joe stoutly, with the mental reservation that he would keep it if it pleased him.

"Release him," said the deacon.

In a moment the two guards of Joe had undone the handcuffs from his wrists, and he stood a free man, but unarmed, in the midst of the "Destroying Angels." Then the deacon made a signal of his hand, and the men, who had been furtively watching the scene by the light of the fires, rose and made a great circle round the young man, while the deacon and the chiefs rose and turned to the circle.

"Angels of the Lord's host," said the Mormon chief in a solemn tone, "ye behold before ye a Gentile. What is the doom of a Gentile when he cometh on the land of the Saints of the Lord?"

"Death!" was the answer, in a deep tone, in chorus, delivered by the whole circle.

Even Joe, brave as he was, could not help a slight shudder, which he instantly suppressed, as he heard the stern answer.

"It is well," said the chief; "but when the wicked man turneth from the wickedness that he hath committed, and believeth the word of the Lord, delivered to the Prophet Mormon, what should be done to him then?"

"Test him," was the answer, delivered in the same chorus as before, and the eyes of every man in the circle were fixed on Joe, while the clicking of gun-locks was plainly audible.

"He shall be tested," said the deacon, slowly and solemnly. Then he turned to Joe, and continued:

"Dost thou believe the word of the Lord, delivered to the Prophet Mormon, and Joseph Smith, the Martyr of the Lord?"

Joe, who had determined to go through the

whole performance without exhibiting any doubt, was shrewd enough to answer:

"I believe all ye tell me, deacon. I ain't the man to go back on what I've said."

"Art thou willing to enter the army of the Lord, and fight manfully in his battles?" asked the chief, in the same solemn way.

"That's what I come to do," said Joe.

"Then thou art willing to take the oath?" the Mormon asked.

"I am," said Joe; but this time not without a slight quiver in his voice, for he knew not what he might be called on to swear.

Then the deacon made the prisoner repeat after him an oath of the most tremendous character, in which the man who took it was obliged to call down on himself the vengeance of heaven, in this world and the next, if ever he disobeyed the order of the captain of the Lord's host or any of his officers. Even Joe, bold as he was, shuddered as the oath was repeated, and the circle of Mormon "Destroyers" round him at every sentence uttered a solemn "Amen," and repeated the formula "*Damned be the traitor to time and eternity*," with a ghastly earnestness that left no doubt of their sincerity.

When at last the oath was over the chief gave his right hand to Joe and asked him the final question:

"Brother Destroyer, is there any doubt in thy heart that thou wilt keep what thou hast sworn to?"

"No," responded Joe stoutly, for he felt that his life depended on his going through everything, thick and thin.

The chief turned to a man near him.

"Arm the recruit," he said.

The tall man with red hair whom Joe had heard called "Brother Uzziel," came forward and handed Joe a revolver at once.

Then the chief said to the recruit:

"Brother Joseph, thou art now one of the Lord's host and bound to obey all orders. Cock that pistol."

Joe did as he was bid.

"Place it to thy head and slay thyself and great shall be thy reward in the next world," said the deacon quietly. "The army of the Lord hath need of thy death; therefore *slay thyself*."

Joe hesitated for one instant, and then, with the words of the deacon, that the test was not one that would hurt him, "*if he only showed no fear*," he did as he was bid, and pulled the trigger.

The flash burned his thick hair and the shock of the weapon stunned him so that he nearly fell; but, the next minute a wild yell of approval rung out from the throats of the Destroying Angels, and Joe was surrounded and caught up in the strong arms of a dozen men who bore him aloft in triumph, while the clear voice of the chief was heard above the tumult, crying aloud:

"Great is the mercy of the Lord, and he has accepted his servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

And California Joe realized that his ordeal was over, and that he was accepted into the ranks of the terrible Mormon band, of which, at that early date, nothing or next to nothing, was known by the world, outside Deseret.

He had passed all the tests, had shown that he had the unflinching nerve required by the fanatic successors of Joseph Smith, and from the moment he fired the pistol the Destroying Angels recognized him one of themselves.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WAGON-TRAIN.

THE rest of the night was passed by the Destroying Angels in quiet in the shelter of the ravine, and Joe found himself treated with honor, in spite of his new arrival in the band.

The chief, whose Mormon name he now learned was Nephi, took him apart from the rest to his own fire, and gave him a long series of instructions in his new faith, in which the point that Joe found to be insisted on was the absolute necessity of *passive obedience*, in a member of the band, to all orders, rather than any tenets of faith, which, as Nephi told him, could be learned at any time, when he had opportunity to read the Book of Mormon through and be taught by the priests what concerned his soul's salvation.

This was a relief to Joe, who had been afraid that he would be compelled to learn long texts, which, as he was but a poor scholar, would cost him more trouble than anything else.

After the lesson had been delivered, the deacon—as Joe continued to call him at times, from want of ability to remember his true title—

gave the new recruit a set of arms, similar to those in the hands of the rest of the band, and told him to prove them, the next day, for he might have need of them.

With this he dismissed the new recruit to sleep, and Joe, who had suffered much fatigue and pain since his capture, was glad to seek repose, which was not disturbed till the rays of the morning light shone in at the entrance of the ravine, showing that it faced the east.

Then the whole band rose, with a silence and quiet discipline very different from anything Joe had yet seen, when breakfast was hastily prepared, and the chief gave the order to depart.

Joe found that his faithful mule had been brought along with the train, and he was glad to see his old companion again, for he had feared she would be left behind, as too slow.

But, now that the morning was come, he saw that a good many of the Destroying Angels rode mules instead of horses, though the chief himself had as handsome a steed as he had ever seen in all his life.

The band arose before the sun had risen, and the chief mustered them in a line, when he said:

"Brethren of the Lord's host, to-day is the day of the vengeance of the Saints. The man that speaks a word, till he is bidden, to-day, will be put to death. Follow me."

With that he rode out of the ravine up into a cleft of the mountain, and Joe, who was naturally very loquacious, followed in the ranks with the rest, in the midst of the most oppressive silence he had ever felt in his life. The grim "Angels" rode on with their eyes fixed on their horses' ears, while the Indians, who had the advance and seemed to be employed as flankers and scouts, rode ahead, and the cavalcade entered a maze of ravines and steep ascents, from which they did not emerge till mid-day, when they came out on the other side of the range, and saw below them a beautiful green vale with a running stream that ran through the midst of it, by which a wagon-train, consisting of forty or fifty wagons, was camped, the white tilts of the vehicles arranged in the universal "corral," that is formed at every encampment.

As the Mormon leader saw the sight, he stopped his horse and pointed to the wagons below, with the stern remark, to the man who rode next to him in the leading file:

"Brother Uzziel, the Lord hath delivered them into our hands."

Then Joe began to realize what he had not done before, that there was more work to do, and that he, the new recruit, was expected to take part in it.

The train below was evidently inimical to the Mormons in some way, and was to be destroyed.

Who were they, these strangers, and what were they doing there?

He had no time to think over this, or what he should do, for the Mormon leader waved his hand, and the whole band set off down the descent to the valley at a slow trot.

The Indians seemed to have vanished in the earth at first, but as the Destroying Angels rode on, Joe caught sight of the plumes of the savages at the side of a thicket, where they were sheltered from view of the emigrants in the train, awaiting the coming of their white allies before the work of destruction began.

But the coming of the white men was not disguised in any way, and the emigrants caught sight of them at once, and could be seen running to and fro in camp, as if preparing for them as they came, while the fluttering robes of women and children were plainly visible, as they clustered in groups at the edge of the camp to look at the gayly-attired horsemen.

The descent to the valley was not long, and the column of over a hundred men debouched in the green plain, in full sight of the wagons, at less than a mile therefrom, when a small party of horsemen rode out of the camp, and came at a gallop toward the "Destroying Angels."

The Mormon leader turned to his men, to say, in his stern tones:

"Not a word from the ranks. The Lord will give his servant words to say to these Gentiles. Hold ye your peace."

Joe, intensely excited now that the crisis was coming, yet congratulated himself that he was within a few files of the leader, for he could hear all that went on.

He kept still and watched.

The men from the camp were only about five or six in number, and they passed the thicket in

which the Indians were concealed, without seeing the latter, to all appearance.

The wily savages hid themselves as the riders advanced and came into pistol-shot of the Mormons, when the emigrants halted, as if uncertain what to do, and one of them rode on alone crying out as he came:

"Who are you, gentlemen, and what do you want?"

Nephi called out the answer:

"We are Saints of the Lord, and we are on our land. What do ye here?"

The leader of the emigrants seemed puzzled by the reply, for he called back:

"We want only a free passage, and no more. If you are Mormons, we are your friends, and wish you no harm."

"Come on then, and ride with me," was the stern reply of the chief. "If it be the will of the Lord that ye shall all turn to the faith, it shall be well with ye. If not, not."

The stranger seemed to be puzzled by the language of the Mormon leader, for he allowed the deacon, who had been riding on all the time, to come close up to him, when Nephi grimly remarked:

"Ride by me, friend, if thou valuest thy life."

As he spoke, he made an imperceptible signal with his hand, and Joe felt his next neighbor in the ranks nudge him.

Looking that way, he saw that all the "Angels" had drawn their revolvers, and were riding with them down by their sides.

Understanding the signal that he must do the same, the young hunter drew his pistol and rode on, with his heart beating wildly.

He saw that something terrible was about to happen, and he could do nothing to help the poor creatures, who were to be murdered, as he felt sure, from the expression of the chief's face, set in its sternest frown.

The troop of Mormons rode on at the same slow pace, taking the unhappy man who had come to meet them along with them; and, as they came up to the rest, they motioned them into the ranks with silent gestures with their pistols, that proved efficacious as words.

One by one, the strangers fell into the ranks, and rode there, pale and frightened; for it was evident that they had been taken by surprise, by the coming of the Destroying Angels.

As they came nearer to the camp the men who had been running to the defense of the wagons seemed resolved to shoot, and the Mormon chief said sternly to the young man who had come to meet him:

"Friend, ride forward, and tell those madmen that, if a shot is fired, every head in this camp shall be laid low in the dust; but, if they give up their arms, they shall be saved. This land is the Lord's and we are his people; but we do not desire to slay any that will serve the Lord."

The man who had come there, pale and frightened, immediately rode off, as hard as he could tear, to the camp, while the Mormons continued their measured and slow advance, with the object of producing the greatest moral effect by their imposing appearance.

Joe heard the envoy shouting out something in the camp, and a great confusion reigned there for the space of about three minutes, during which the Mormons continued to advance.

Then they saw him coming forward again at full gallop, and as soon as he was near enough to be heard, he called out:

"For God's sake, gentlemen, promise not to hurt the women and children, and we will surrender."

The Mormon chief put up his hand, and the whole column halted as if by magic.

Then he said slowly:

"Go back to thy people, and tell them that if they will send out all their arms, and pile them on the meadow, in front, my young men shall not hurt them. But if it be not done in the space of five minutes, not one man, woman or child shall be left alive to tell the tale that ye entered our territory without our leave."

The wagon-master of the train—for such he was—immediately dashed off, and the Mormons halted and waited sternly, the chief drawing his watch in an ostentatious way, that the men in camp might see it, while he waited for the quiet surrender of nearly sixty armed men.

Joe, with his heart in his mouth, wished that they would defend themselves, for he knew that if they did so, they would have a fair chance of selling their lives dearly, and he had a notion that he himself might be able to help them, in the confusion that was sure to ensue.

But, to his incredulous amazement and scorn,

before the five minutes had expired, the wagon-master came out from the camp, followed by a number of men on foot, and they threw their arms down before the Mormon chief, who sat on his horse, with a cold and severe air, as if they were his slaves and he their master.

As soon as this had been accomplished, Nephi beckoned to the wagon-master, who advanced, his face very pale, and took off his hat humbly.

"Look me in the face, man, and if thou liest it will be the worse for thee," the Mormon chief said, in his most distinct tones. "Are these all the arms of thy men, or hast thou hidden any?"

"So help me God, sir, they are all we have," was the trembling response, "and we claim your mercy. You promised us our lives. Indeed we had no idea that you Mormon gentlemen had any objection to peaceable emigrants crossing your territory, to find a short cut to the mines."

Nephi frowned at him.

"Who told thee to speak, when thou wert not bidden?" he asked sternly. "Now, by the soul of the Prophet Mormon, I swear, that I will not eat or drink, this day, till thou and all thy men have become as we are, and the women are sealed to my followers. Ye have come to our territory uninvited, and have stolen our goods. Are ye willing to join the church of the Saints, and give up all your goods to the bishop?"

The wagon-master hesitated, and his face grew ghastly, as he faltered:

"Why, you would not force us to change our religion; would you, sir? We are at your mercy, but you promised that, if we surrendered, we should have fair treatment."

"And so shall ye have!" thundered the Mormon, as he rose in his stirrups and glared at the unhappy wagon-master. "Such justice shall ye have as the children of Israel meted out to the Canaanites, when they took Jericho. To your work, oh Angels of the Lord!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MASSACRE.

WITH that, and without another moment of warning, he drew a pistol and shot down the wagon-master, before the unhappy man could defend himself or even cry for mercy, while the Destroying Angels, at the signal opened a fusillade on the cowering and unarmed men before them, and charged the camp at full speed, shooting like fiends into the people, who ran from them in all directions, while they were hunted down like wild beasts by the infuriated Mormons. As for Joe himself, he hesitated for a moment as to what to do, when the stern voice of the chief came to him, like a trumpet-call:

"Strike and spare not; but touch not the women or any female child."

Joe saw that he would have to do as the rest did, or be shot down like a dog; for the hideous fury of the Mormons was fully aroused; so he set off at full speed on his old mule, shooting right and left as he went, but taking care to send all his bullets over the heads of the unhappy fugitives.

He had this in his favor that he was not used to his new rifle and pistols, and had no idea how they shot, so that his misses did not attract attention among the men who surrounded him, while his wild yells were louder than any of them.

But he could do nothing to save any of the men, who were slaughtered without mercy by the fierce riders of the Mormon apostle, as they huddled together, realizing, too late, the shameful trick to which they had been subjected. One young man, swift of foot, took to flight and managed to get to the woods before he could be shot down, but the Indians had spied him as they hung on the outskirts of the massacre, and they ran after him into the wood, and soon came out, howling in triumph, bearing the bloody scalp to show they had succeeded.

But the slaughter of the men was not to Joe the worst feature of the whole affair, for it was after the Mormons had entered the camp that his blood ran cold to see what they did.

There, cowering under the wagons, were a number of women and children, and the men dismounted from their horses, rushed into the shrieking groups, and deliberately picked out every boy they could find, even those of three or four years old, whom they slaughtered with as little compunction as if the poor little things had been sheep.

But the noise and bloodshed did not last long, and Joe soon heard the stern voice of the Mor-

mon apostle, crying from the midst of the camp:

"What, ho, brethren! The men are gone that feared not the Lord. Bring forth the women, and let the lots be cast."

Then the young Kentuckian, hardly knowing if he were asleep or awake, saw the women driven, with the few female children that were left after the hideous slaughter he had just witnessed, into the open meadow outside the camp, the Destroying Angels waving their long whips over the heads of the trembling creatures, and not by any means sparing of blows to those that lingered or hesitated.

When a poor mother, who had seen her children killed before her eyes, wept aloud and refused to go forward, the whip was savagely used, till the poor distracted being rushed into the meadow, screaming wildly as she went.

Then the Mormon apostle rode out alone, and called out:

"Let the women be counted."

At the word, a stalwart Mormon came forward, and called out to the trembling captives:

"Hyar, you-'uns, git in a row, so we kin caount ye, this-a-way."

He indicated a line in which to march, and they were compelled to move out in file, while the next man counted them, as they passed, in full view of the Mormon chief, to the number of eighty-five women and thirty-seven girl children.

It was a pitiful spectacle to see them, the corpses of their dead fathers, brothers and husbands, covering the ground all round them; but the face of the Mormon leader showed not the slightest sign of pity, or any emotion other than a certain grim satisfaction; and when the count was complete, he said quietly:

"We will cast the lots for choice."

Then he took off his broad hat, and Uzziel came forward and cast in it two little balls, when Nephi cried out:

"Let the brethren advance, and take the lot of the Lord."

The men seemed to know what was coming, for they rode up to the leader at a foot-pace, two by two. Each man, as he passed Nephi, put his hand into the hat, took up a ball, dropped it and rode on, diverging to the right or left.

Joe did not understand what they were doing or what the lot consisted in; but he took his place with the rest, having a companion with him, and happening to be nearly the last man of the file.

When he got to the hat, he saw that the men who had preceded him had divided into two bodies, one of which had gone to the right, the other to the left.

As he neared the apostle, Nephi recognized him, and said, with an approving smile:

"Son Joseph, thou hast done well this day. Take the lot of the Lord. If the ball is white, take thy place on the right hand; if it be black, then go with the men who are waiting for the second choice."

Joe did as he was ordered—lifted the ball, which he could not see in the way Nephi held the hat, and saw that it was white.

"Go to the right," said Simplicity Fox, and Joe obeyed.

When he got there, he found a group of about fifty men, and Uzziel said to him, with a grim smile:

"The Lord hath been good to thee to-day, brother, for there are old members of the church that will have to be satisfied with no wife, to-day."

Joe, puzzled at the remark, asked:

"Why, what air we doing?"

"We air choosing our wives, after the manner of the children of Israel, when they spoiled the Canaanites," replied Uzziel, gravely. "There are eighty-five women to a hundred and ten men, besides the allies, so that the lot is necessary. The first choice is the next lot; for Nephi hath no love for these things, having ten women sealed to him already."

Then the men who had been left out in the first lot rode out again in pairs, till they had chosen a second company; and each, as he passed in at the gate of success, was called aloud by the number he occupied in the line, by one of the Mormon sub-chiefs. Joe found his own number to be forty-nine, and was cautioned to remember it.

Then, when the number of eighty-five had been completed, the chief called out:

"Let the Saints of the Lord advance and choose each one a wife, from the captives of the Lord!"

Then the sub-chief called:

"Number One!"

Out dashed a rather handsome young Mormon, with a wild-looking face and the eager expression of a man who knows he has not long to choose. He rode up to the women and cast his eye over them as he passed along the front, till he set eyes on one who had the appearance of a washerwoman of Irish blood, when he called out:

"Come hither, woman."

The poor woman cowered and faltered; but the man, with a frown, lifted his long whip, and, echoing his first call, made as though he would use the cruel lash.

In a moment she came running to him, shrieking:

"Oh! for God's sake, sir, don't bate! I'll come—indeed I'll come, sir!"

The young savage laughed, as he let out the lash, and took a piece out of the poor woman's shoulder, saying as he did so:

"Then come quickly, or I may change my mind, and give thee to the Indians."

Then he took her to one side, and Joe saw him sitting on his horse, questioning her, as if he were a king and she a slave, while the next man took his choice.

Joe noticed that the second man, after looking over the crowd, selected another big, powerful woman, getting old and wrinkled already, and asked his next neighbor:

"Why do they take such wives as that?"

The Mormon looked at him with surprise, and then smiled as he answered:

"Ah, it is thou, the recruit. When thou hast been as long in the faith as I have, thou wilt learn that the Saints choose their wives, not for looks, but for wear. It will be thy turn after me, and do as thou wilt. Thou wilt choose one of the handsome ones, I doubt not. Well, no one will dispute with thee for that."

His own name was called after a while, and Joe saw him go out and take the biggest and strongest woman left in the crowd, now that so many had had their pick.

She was a person who looked as if she had been a farmer's wife and used to hard labor all her life, while her flaxen hair and blue eyes were unmistakably German.

Then Joe heard his own number called, and he rode out, not knowing exactly what to do.

The apostle Nephi saw him come, and, smiling, said to him:

"Thou seest that the Saints of the Lord have their rewards on earth, as well as in heaven. Choose well, young man, and take thee a wife; for the Saints will take care of thee, when we get to Deseret."

Thus adjured, and not knowing what else to do, Joe rode up to the crowd, and, looking over it, was puzzled what to do. Naturally bashful, and confronted by so many women's eyes, the only thing that reassured him was the fact that they all looked pleadingly at him, for they saw that his face was good-natured.

At haphazard he pointed to the middle of the crowd, and called out:

"Hyar, you gal in the blue dress, come hyar. I choose you."

The girl in the blue dress had her back turned to him, and it was only the fact of seeing the patch of color in the midst of other hues, that had decided his choice at all. He had taken an idea that he would try and save one girl and carry her away from the power of the Mormons; and it mattered little to him which it was, when there was so much misery that he knew himself powerless to relieve in any event. He could but save one, at the risk of his life, if indeed that were possible.

Nevertheless it would be wrong to say that, when the girl in the blue dress turned round and disclosed a very beautiful face under a sun-bonnet, with golden curls hanging tangled round the countenance, he did not experience a thrill of pleasure that found vent in a flush, and caused his cynical friend, who had given him such practical advice, to say sardonically:

"Thar, I knowed he'd do it. Ye won't do it arter ye've got sealed to a few more, brother. It's the work they does that makes 'em worth having."

But Joe was deaf to the voice of his experienced friend, and beckoned kindly to the girl in the blue dress who, poor thing, came tremblingly forward, eying him in a frightened way, till she got near his horse, when another Mormon, who was next after Joe came riding by, calling out in a jeering tone:

"Take her away, brother, for we old hands don't want no such gals as that. They don't work fur what they eat."

Joe turned on him fiercely:

"Mind yer own biz and leave the gal alone. I'm choosin' her, not you."

The Mormon looked as if he would have made a surly answer; but the voice of Nephi cut short the wrangle, by saying sternly:

"Lemuel, the fault is thine. The recruit is new to our ways, but he has fought well and will fight better when the time comes. Hold thy peace and let her alone."

Lemuel subsided, and Joe said to the girl in an undertone:

"Keep by my hoss and don't be skeered. No one shan't hurt ye."

The girl looked up at him timidly, as if the kindness of the tone reassured her, and her blue eyes filled with tears as she obeyed him.

CHAPTER XIV.

JOE'S CAPTIVE.

THE other Mormons had taken their prisoners away, and the choice was accomplished in peace; when Joe found himself alone, at a distance from the rest, with his strangely-met captive.

Then he spoke quickly to her:

"Gal, don't be afraid. I ain't one of these devils; though they've got me among 'em. I'll help ye to git off, if ye'll trust me. What's yer name?"

She looked up at him in a wild sort of way, as if she did not dare to believe him, and faltered:

"Sir—I— Oh, sir, who are you?"

Joe frowned impatiently, for he knew he had not much time to speak, without exciting the attention of the other Mormons.

"Never mind who I am," he said. "It's who you are that I'm askin' ye. What's yer name, and who is yer folks?"

Something in his tone seemed to make her think he meant what he said, for she answered:

"My name is Alice Foster, and my father was killed by those men. Oh, sir, are they going to kill me too?"

"I ain't, little one," he responded kindly. "I ain't goin' to do no sich thing; but air you the gal to stand hardship, if I try to git ye off this very night? Whar air yer other folks, or ain't ye got any?"

"I have an uncle living in San Francisco," she said quickly, seeming to be encouraged again. "I will do what I can, sir, for I am stronger than I look, but what can we do? These men will kill us both, if they find us out."

Joe nodded.

"That's true as gospel, little one. But then I don't intend they shall find us out. Not ef I know what I'm about, and I think I do. Tell me another thing. Who's got the best hosses in your camp—that is, who had the hosses that could outrun all the rest? Or don't ye know?"

The girl's face brightened up in a moment, as she replied:

"There is a pair of bay horses, that my father owned. I rode one of them, and he kept the other for hunting on the road. If we could get them, they can run faster than anything in the camp. They are thoroughbreds. My father came from Virginia, and they are the best blood of the State, sir."

Joe nodded.

"That's all I wanter know, little one. I'll git aout of this devil's den, afore long, or I'll know the reason why."

Then he went back to the rest of the men, as they were completing their choice from among the weeping captives, in the style, as they put it, of "the children of Israel spoiling the Canaanites," and looked on, with Alice Foster by his side.

Then came the division of the property of the unhappy emigrants, and Joe managed to get, in that division, the two horses which, he knew from Alice, were the best in the camp. Somewhat to his surprise too, he had no difficulty in securing them; for the Mormons seemed to be set on having, in the way of animals, the same useful and solid qualities that they chose in their wives.

Among the rest of the plunder, which was distributed by lot, Joe drew a wagon and six oxen, which excited the envy of several of the "Angels," and when they found Joe was open to a trade, they were only too willing to exchange with him for what he wanted.

As the result of the morning's work, he found himself the proud possessor of two fine horses; a stout mule, with a pack-saddle; arms enough to provide him with four revolvers and a new rifle of the Sharpe's pattern, with a barrel like that of his own old Kentucky shooter, while his new captive had a side-saddle, and was able to ride with him, in the style of a backwoods belle.

The "Angels" sneered at him for his choice; but the chief commended him publicly, saying that "the new recruit would prove a warrior,

and not a plowman; and therefore he was wise to equip himself as a warrior alone, and leave the farm work to those who had entered the army of the Lord before him."

And, in all this time, Joe had the satisfaction of seeing that he had excited no suspicion in the mind of the Mormon chief, so completely had he managed to simulate zeal in his new faith.

Then the wagon-train, under its new masters, was put on the road again, and Joe had an opportunity to see the way the Mormons treated their captives, when they were women.

He had feared a terrible scene after the battle was over; but, on the contrary, the Saints seemed to be bent on nothing but making their captives as comfortable and happy as could be done, under the circumstances.

True, they had murdered all their kinsfolk at one blow, but they seemed to be determined on making the women forget this, and realize that they were in a new life, where the old one would be sunk forever.

Joe heard Uzziel, who was riding near him at the side of one of the wagons, speaking to the stout Irishwoman whom he had taken for a wife.

The poor woman was lamenting her fate and the loss of her husband, who had been shot in the massacre, when Uzziel said:

"Nora, hold thy peace; for it was the will of the Lord, and he hath given thee a better husband than thou hadst before. The wives of the Saints are not like the wives of the Gentiles, worn down with hard work. They live together like a band of sisters, and are even as the wives of the prophet Jacob, of whom thou hast heard, in that they dwell in the same tent."

"But what'll I do when poor Pat's in Purgatory, and niver a mass can be said for his soul?" asked Nora, weeping. "Ah, it's all very well for you to talk, whin ye've killed the pore felly as if he war a sheep; but av ye think I'll forgit Pat so 'asy, ye make a big mistake, mister."

Uzziel frowned at her as he replied:

"Nora, knowest thou what is done to the woman who reviles her husband, in the church of the Saints of the Lord?"

Nora turned her eyes on him with an apprehensive glance, as she said, falteringly:

"No, sor."

"She is beaten with many stripes, Nora; and, if thou art wise, thou wilt forget thy Gentile, and make up thy mind to be happy with the Saint of the Lord. They that do so are honored among women, and their children are princes."

She was about to answer, when he shook his long whip menacingly, adding:

"But if thou art stiff-necked, then beware; for verily I say unto thee, we are not wont to take any reviling from our women."

And there was something so fierce in his eye that the poor woman shrunk back into the wagon, in which she was riding, and said no more.

The caravan went on for the rest of the afternoon, and in the evening came out of the mountains in view of a great plain covered with a carpet of sage-green grass, that sloped down to the blue waters of a distant lake, that more resembled a sea, on the horizon; while in the midst of the plain, about ten or twelve miles from this water, lay a cluster of houses and buildings that looked like forts in the midst of high mud walls, that gave the town—for such it was—a strange, medieval appearance in the midst of the American continent.

The place seemed to cover a great deal of ground, and the buildings were embowered in trees, while the glittering lines of wide ditches and canals, that ran from the foot of the mountain range that bordered the plain, showed that irrigation had been freely used to make the wilderness bloom.

The scene was full of beauty, and Joe could not help a thrill of pleasure as he looked at it; but his attention was almost immediately attracted to the spectacle of three wagons halted on the foot of the spur on which their own caravan was moving, in which he recognized the Scott and Gabelle equipages, with a guard of several Mormons round them.

"They must have gone some other way," he said to himself; and as he thought this, the voice of Nephi called him.

"Son Joseph, come bither," he said to himself; and as he thought this, the voice of Nephi called him.

Joe left Alice, with a whispered injunction to keep where she was in the procession, and rode up to his chief who said to him:

"Son Joseph, thou hast done well to-day, and thou art the best mounted of our party now. Take thy wife, ride down to that wagon, and

tell the men there to come with me. The Scotts will need no guide now, for they can see the walls of Deseret for themselves; but they need to be watched, and I can spare none of my old men. We have work in another direction. Take them, and lead them toward the city. To-night they can camp where they are and tomorrow thou wilt bring them in at the east gate, where there will be men waiting for thee. Go, and God speed thee."

Joe, with a beating heart, bowed his head and said quietly:

"I'll do it, deacon."

Then he rode off with Alice, down the hills, and saw that the Mormon caravan took another way by which to enter the city, while he rode to the wagons of the Scotts.

He found there several of the Mormon "Destroyers" and told them that the chief wanted them, an order which met with the usual unhesitating obedience of the band.

Then Joe found himself alone, for the first time since the arrival of the Indians, with the Scott and Gabelle family.

The Scotts seemed to be stricken with wonder at the sight of him in his new equipment, with the very pretty girl who was riding beside him; and the Scott girls, especially, came out to stare at Alice, with the undisguised curiosity of their natures.

Joe affected a curt and authoritative manner; told the father of the family what were the orders of the chief Nephi; and saw that the Scott brood was completely subdued by the splendor of his appearance.

He told them to go into camp, and they obeyed him, while he took Alice Foster apart a little way, and began to tell her what he had determined to do that very night.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FLIGHT.

THE stars were shining like diamonds in the clear and unclouded sky over the valley of Great Salt Lake; the white tilts of the wagons stood like sheeted ghosts in the gloom; the mules and oxen were lying down by the camp, and the loud snores of the men and women of the Scott family showed that they were fast asleep, when Joe rose from the place where he had been lying alone, pretending to sleep, and approached what looked like a bundle of clothes lying on the grass near where two horses were picketed.

"Alice," he said in a low tone, "it's time, if ye dar' try it. I'm a-gwine; but ef you're afeard ye kin stay hyar. They won't hurt you."

The bundle moved, and the face of the captive girl was put forth from the blankets in which she had been wrapped by Joe's fostering care.

"I was not asleep," she said, quietly. "I was thinking that you are the noblest man God ever made, and that I would rather go with you and be killed on the way, than live here among these wretches, though they should make a princess of me. I am ready to go."

She rose as she spoke, and the young hunter proceeded to saddle the horses, which he had taken as his share of the spoil the day before. He led them carefully away from the vicinity of the camp, to avoid rousing the sleeping Scotts. Within a quarter of an hour they were saddled and loaded, when Joe helped his new companion to mount her horse, and they rode away, silently as ghosts, in the darkness, taking the western route, by the foot of the great lake where the Mormons were settled.

Not a word was spoken by either till they had gone near a mile from the camp without meeting a living creature, when Joe said to his companion:

"Naow we kin talk, Miss Alice. Fu'st thing I got to tell you is this, to show ye ye needn't be skeered of bein' alone with me. I'm a married man, and the gal I married, not six months ago, is the one I love with all my heart. Ye needn't hev no more fear of me nor ef I war yer brother. So don't git skeered abaout bein' hyar alone with me, for I'll take good keer of ye."

The girl all alone with him in the starlight, put out her hand and said, quietly:

"I knew I could trust you from the first. Your face told me that. I am not afraid to be alone with you anywhere."

Joe felt his heart leap as she spoke, and he went on:

"Thar's another thing I want to say to ye. My name ain't what them others calls me. My name—"

"Never mind telling me," interposed the girl. "I have trusted you under the name of

California Joe, and I don't want to hear any other name, till we are safe out of the perils that surround us. Tell me only this: what do you think of doing?"

Joe hesitated a moment.

"I ain't sure yet; but I've b'en lookin' on the map, and I find, on the other side of the Salt Lake, thar's a hull grist of kentry we've got to cross, afore we git to Californy. Them Mormons is baound to foller us, when they find we're gone, and hunt us daown, ef they kin. We've got to trust to the heels of aour hosses, and to keep aout of the way of the Injuns."

Alice turned her head toward him in the starlight, to say:

"My father knew a great deal about Indians, and he told me that, after we had passed Salt Lake, we should find them peaceable and quiet, some of them friendly to the whites, and all of them very different to the men of the plains, who ride on horses and know no mercy. Besides, he told me that there is a party of United States troops, somewhere out here, surveying the country, and that we should be sure to meet them soon after we had passed the Mormon settlements."

"Is that so?" said Joe, pleased at the news. "Did he tell ye where they were likely to be faound, Miss Alice?"

"He did. The fact is—"

Here the girl hesitated, and Joe said:

"Speak aout, Miss Alice. What is it?"

"The fact is," said the girl, "that there is a gentleman—an officer in the party—who is an old friend of ours, and if we could once meet him, we should be safe."

"Then, the sooner we make tracks to git aout of this darned kentry," said Joe energetically, "the better it will be fur us, Miss Alice. Hev ye any idee whar these sojers will be faound?"

"My father said that they were somewhere in the mountains, by a place called Pilot's Peak."

Joe uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"The very place I were a-lookin' at, on the map, afore I come aout. We're on the straight road thar. The emigrant trail goes on the other side of the lake, and there's a desert marked on the map, this side; so the Mormons wont think we'd dar go that way, but I reckon we kin struggle along somehaow."

"If you can do it, I can," said she resolutely.

Then they put their horses to a trot, and went on rapidly for several hours, till the green carpet of grass that had so long been under their feet gave way to sand, and Joe said, with a sigh:

"We've come to the desert, and no mistake, Miss Alice. The question is, whether we kin push acrost it or not."

"We must!" she answered earnestly. "If we die, we die, but *anything* is better than falling into the hands of those wretches."

She urged her horse forward into the sand as she spoke, and Joe followed her.

All night long they rode, and when the first glow of dawn appeared in the sky, they saw a chain of mountains before them and managed to reach them before the light had become strong.

The prospect around them as the sun rose was bare and barren enough, but there were rocks that promised shade from the sun, which was hot and scorching at that time of the year, and a hiding-place from any curious eyes that might be scanning the country below.

Just as the sun rose, Joe drew up his horse in the shadow of a great rock, and said:

"Naow, Miss Alice, it's time we went into camp."

Alice looked round her disconsolately enough, but there was no help for it. The horses were tired and covered with sweat, and to take them any further in the heat which both knew was coming would be to distress them unnecessarily.

Besides, Joe, who had become a good deal of a scout in the course of his march from the Kansas, knew, from the lay of the rocks and hills round him, that he would probably find water near the place where they were, if he looked well.

The formation of the hills was such that it made a good many basins, and he went off on foot through the hills, till he found one of these which contained drinkable water, beside which grew some trees and bushes. To return to Alice and transfer the horses and mule to the basin, where they went into camp in comparative comfort, was the work of a short time, and the shade of the trees, with the water, soon freshened up the horses, which were looking gaunt and distressed.

They set to work hungrily at the scanty grass in the little basin, while Joe went back to the place where they had first stopped, where he scanned the plain to find if anybody was following them.

Nothing was in sight as far as he could see, and the rest of the day was passed in peace till about an hour from sunset, when he saw some dark moving objects, on the yellow sand of the desert below him, which he soon resolved into horsemen, coming on the trail he and his companion had left behind them.

They were a long way off, but he could count the dots; for his eyesight had become trained to the clear atmosphere of the western desert, and he had acquired some of the Indians' power of appreciating character in distant things.

He realized that there were fifteen horsemen on his trail, and the problem of what was best to do, came to his mind at once.

If he remained where he was, the enemy, if such was the approaching party, would come up with him, and he would have to defend himself and his companion.

True, he felt confident that he could do so in the place where he was, and probably beat off anything less than a score of men; but Alice or himself might get hurt in the affair, and in that case nothing could save them. On the other hand, if he ran, before he was certain that the foe were on his trail, he might run into another party, coming from some other direction.

Thinking over all this, he watched the party as he rode along, and noticed that it followed the very trail that he had come by, the night before.

Feeling certain that he had no time to lose, he went back and roused Alice; saddled the horses, and set off, in the twilight, through the mountains.

He took his course by the north star, that he saw gleaming over the mountain tops to the right, and traversed pass after pass, till the morning again began to dawn, when he and his companion found themselves at the edge of the range, which they had been traversing all night.

As the sun rose, they came out in view of an elevated plain, covered with grass, which rejoiced them greatly: and, far off in the plain, they saw something else, which gave them a start and caused them to hide hurriedly behind some rocks for fear they might be seen—a curl of smoke rising from a fire, around which were spread the white coverings of several tents, shining in the light of the morning sun.

There were others besides themselves in the mountains, and the question was, who were the strangers. The increasing light revealed the mystery, when Alice cried joyfully:

"See, see! *The Stars and Stripes!*"

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

It was indeed the Stars and Stripes, the flag of their native land and Government, which the fugitives from Mormon "Destroyers" saw as the sun glanced on the banner.

The distance was so great that they could not distinguish it plainly, but there was a flag on the top of one of the white tents, and it was of that general pinkish effect which is given by the American flag at a distance, while there could be no other that would be hoisted in such a place at such a time.

The horses were not tired after their night-march, as they had been the night before; for they had gone at a much slower pace, and had had the advantage of a good rest. Therefore, when Joe proposed that they go on at once to the tents and find out what was the party there, Alice eagerly assented; and they rode off, descending the mountain as fast as they dared till they entered the plain.

As they rode down into the first green grass they had seen since they left Salt Lake, Joe looked up behind him and was surprised to see, on the summit of the ridge they had just left, the figure of a horseman, outlined against the early morning sun, in full view.

The next moment came a flash and a puff of white smoke. The hiss of a bullet, dropping close to his horse's feet, showed that the "Destroying Angels" were after them.

As the bullet dashed up a little cloud of dirt beside him, Joe saw several other men come out beside the first, and a volley was sent down after the fugitives, which produced a disastrous effect.

Joe's horse staggered, then pitched forward on its head, shot dead, while Alice's animal, with a snort of terror, set off full speed, and the girl herself swayed to and fro in the saddle.

As for Joe, he saw that there was no time to lose. He was as yet unwounded, but he did not know how much longer he might stay so. He rose from the ground where he had been stretched, and taking the bridle of the pack-mule, ran off as hard as he could across the grass, trying to get out of gunshot as soon as he could.

Shot after shot was fired at him, and he heard the thud of the bullets all round him, while the pack of the mule was struck more than once.

The animal beside him ran fast, dragging him along, and he had hard work to keep it from twitching the halter out of his hand and leaving him alone on the plain.

But the other horse, carrying Alice ran on as if it knew where there was safety, and Joe saw it nearing the tents from the distance, while, from the appearance of several spots on the grass, between him and the tents, he judged that the occupants thereof had caught sight of the puffs of smoke, and were coming to the rescue.

At last the bullets ceased to whistle close to the fugitive, and Joe, looking round, saw that the horsemen had disappeared from the top of the mountain, and were coming down after him.

He knew that, if they caught him on foot, he would find no mercy from them, so he hastily halted; threw the pack off the mule; mounted, bare-back, and pursued his way under whip and spur.

The bay thoroughbred of Alice Foster was still before him and she could be seen still sitting in the saddle, but Joe had not forgotten that he had seen her sway to and fro in the seat, in a way that convinced him she was hurt.

At last he got time to look back again. The whole band of horsemen, that had pursued him and his fair charge, were now clear of the mountain, and coming across the plain at racing pace.

Joe looked forward and saw that the strangers of the tents were still some way off, while the "Destroying Angels" were not half a mile behind him, and coming up fast.

They evidently hoped to catch and kill him before he could get to the soldiers; for such, he had no doubt, were the men at the tents.

The massacre of the day before had to be hushed up; and his death and that of the girl were probably necessary, for the safety of the Mormon community from discovery.

Joe plied the whip over the mule he bestrode, in a way that astonished the animal, and managed to keep his distance for nearly two miles further, while he had the satisfaction of seeing that Alice was gaining on him and the pursuers, at a rate that showed the superiority of her horse.

At last the young hunter glancing back, saw that the Mormons were getting ready to shoot, and the determination to defend himself to the last took possession of him.

He halted and wheeled his mule, when the first shot from the enemy sent the poor beast down in a heap, and Joe found himself unable to fly any longer.

With the instinct of self-defense, but no idea that he was doing the very thing which a veteran on the prairie would have done in his place, Joe rolled over behind his mule. Sheltering himself behind the body he leveled his rifle over it and awaited the pursuers.

On they came at full speed, one after the other, as they had been strung out in the chase, and Joe, with a beating heart, for it was his first fight in earnest, since the trial by the Indians—fired at the leader, and had the satisfaction of seeing him tumble from his saddle, while his pony ran on alone.

He had found the sighting of his new Sharpe's rifle correct as that of the old Kentucky weapon, on which he had prided himself, and from that moment he felt secure.

The loading was so rapid and simple that he had a cartridge in before the pony had fairly flung the body of its rider, and fired a second shot at the next man in file just as he was about to return the compliment.

Again the true rifle laid its victim low and the Mormons, who resembled Indians in their ferocity, seeming also to resemble them in their dislike of death, faltered and halted in full sight for a moment, when a third shot sent a third man from the saddle, a corpse.

That settled the business, for they fled in haste, but still pursued the girl, passing by Joe as he lay there, and firing a volley at him, with no other effect than to make him hug his cover more closely.

Then, as they dashed on, he saw that the ponies of the men who had been shot had been

left by the rest, and he thought he could do no better than to try and capture one.

He saw that the animals had taken to feeding as soon as they were released from their riders, and he crept softly toward the nearest, keeping a sharp lookout all the time for the rest of the Mormons, till he had gotten quite close to a pony which was too busy feeding to notice him, or too tame to run away.

A thrill of happiness shot through his heart as he caught the bridle, and in another moment he was on the back of the little animal and at full speed after the Mormons.

It did not take him long to catch up, for the Mormons were riding much slower now, as if they despaired of catching the girl; and he, putting the pony to the utmost speed, soon came up close enough to open hostilities.

To do this he halted the pony and fired a shot at the nearest Mormon which sent that worthy out of his saddle, when the rest of the "Angels" turned and came back at him like a tempest, determined to kill him at least.

But the tables were turned now; for Joe knew he had the heels of any there. The pony he had secured was the swiftest in the party, or it would not have taken the lead and got its first rider shot by him, when it did. He therefore kept the animal at sufficient pace to keep out of close action, while he began to try his hand at those flying shots which afterward became his specialty on the plains.

The Mormons replied, but they did not seem to have as much skill as he, and he managed to keep from getting hit, while he wounded two more men, and dropped a pony in its tracks.

In the excitement of the fight he had become forgetful of where he was, when he was roused by the whistle of a bullet close to him from the opposite quarter to where the Mormons were chasing him showing that another party had come on the scene.

Looking round, he saw the blue uniforms of the United States soldiers, and his heart leaped in him as he recognized them.

With a wild yell he rode to meet them, while the Mormons turned tail and rode to the mountains, with a desperate speed that showed how they were completely demoralized.

A moment later he met the soldiers; and as they dashed by him, he shouted to them:

"Give 'em the devil, boys! Give it to 'em! They murdered a hull train, yesterday."

There were but a half-score of soldiers in the party; but as soon as the Mormons saw them, they fled, with a desperate speed that evinced how much they were afraid of being caught.

In good sooth they knew that, if their secret practices and murders once got out to the world at large, and they were discovered, as they really were, the States would soon be too hot to hold them.

But the soldiers did not pursue far.

Joe, as he halted by the steaming horse which had carried Alice Foster to safety, saw that they were but the escort of a party of men, with surveyors' instruments and tents on whom they had come by accident, and when he rode up to the officer in command and told him what had happened, he received for reply:

"My good fellow, we have nothing to do with that. If the Mormons come here to attack us, we will defend ourselves, and report the fact; but as for your stories about massacres, we don't believe them; for we have been among the Mormons ourselves, and have found them very quiet, good sort of people; industrious, active and enterprising, and ready to help us on all occasions. The trouble with you is that you have been stealing from them, or something of the sort, and they wanted to punish you. It was not the right thing for them to do, in the way they were doing when we saw them; but since they have acknowledged our party and gone away, I don't see what else we can do. You can ride with us for protection for awhile, if you like; but I don't want to hear any of your cock-and-a-bull stories."

And that was all that Joe could get out of the young West-Pointer who commanded the party, who had spent his time among the Saints to good purpose, and who afterward published a book to tell the world what very nice people they were. He absolutely refused to believe a word that Joe or Alice told him about the massacre, and insisted that they had been stealing from the Mormons, and were being chased therefor.

But the party was too strong and well supplied with provisions to make the journey any longer dangerous, and Joe had an opportunity to find whether Alice had been hurt.

He ascertained that, when he saw her sway to and fro in the saddle, when she started, it

was the effect of nervous fright and not of the wound that he feared, so that he was enabled to take her to California, along with a relief party, that came over the mountains with a train of provisions for the surveyors of Lieutenant G., and finally arrived at the city of San Francisco, where the young hunter had a right to the title of "California Joe," at last.

There he found that the uncle of Alice Foster, of whom she had told him, had set up in business for himself, and was rich already, so that the grateful girl was able to repay Joe for some of the kindness and devotion that he had shown her.

When they parted, Joe had become, as he thought, a pretty good plainsman, in the course of the journey, and spent the rest of the summer, and late into the next year, in the mines, seeking for gold-dust, and finding plenty, as did most hard-working men in those early days.

The spring came on, and still California Joe did not think of leaving, for he had not enough to satisfy him; when he took a trip to "Frisco," after a successful month's work to "have a good time," as he put it to himself.

It was while there that he went, for the first time since he had been in California, to the San Francisco post-office, and asked at the window, in his broad Kentucky twang:

"Say, mister, is thar a letter hyar, fur Moses Embrie Milner?"

The clerk hunted for some time and at last brought out a letter, faded from long lying there, with the remark:

"Lucky you come here, young feller, or that 'u'd ha' gone to the dead-letter office in another day. Thought there was no such person."

"Waal, ye see," explained Joe with a grin, "that ain't the name the boys knows me by, for they give me the name of California Joe—why or wharfore nobody knows—but they give it me, and it stuck to me, so I don't kinder reckon it'll ever go from me. And what's the news in this hyar letter, mister?"

"How can I tell?" the clerk growled, ill-temperedly. "Do you suppose I have got to read all the letters to men that don't know how to read. Get out and get some one that can read, to tell you."

Joe, considerably humiliated at the cavalier way in which the post-office man spoke, turned away, muttering:

"Tain't that I can't read, I'd have ye unnerstand, but this writing ain't the same as print, and I disremember the handwrite of this hyar."

Scratching his head, he suddenly exclaimed. "I know what I'll do. I'll go to see Mrs. Hardy, and she'll read it fur me."

Mrs. Hardy was none other than Alice Foster, who had recently married the very officer of whom she had spoken when in the mountains, and who was in charge of a branch of the same expedition of which the unbelieving Lieut. G. had the chief supervision.

Lieutenant Hardy had resigned from the army and gone into business in the city where he was making a fortune very rapidly, and had built him a fine house, where Joe knew he was always welcome.

When the rough miner, in his best clothes rung the bell of the mansion and asked for Mrs. Hardy, the servant—a new arrival from the East, engaged, at fifty dollars a month, as the cheapest that could be got in those days—after a glance at him, showed him into a parlor and took his name up to the lady, who came down a little later, with a baby in her arms, happy as only a mother with her first baby and good health can be.

"Why, Joe," she exclaimed, "and what has brought you here? I declare I am very glad to see you, and Mr. Hardy will be delighted. You must stop and have dinner with us, of course, and if you have any time to stay in the city we won't hear of your spending your money at those fearful hotels. You must sleep here."

Joe twisted in the chair she had forced him into, with a violent attack of bashfulness. He had seen, since the girl had come to San Francisco and especially since she had married the army officer, that she was of a very different class in life from what he was, and the knowledge had made him bashful. But Alice Hardy would not let him feel so long, for she was as kind to him as if he had been her own brother, and continued:

"And now, Joe, what can I do for you to-day?—for I know you would not have come here to see me so early if you had not had something for me to do. What is it?"

Joe grinned.

"Waal, the fact is, marm—"

"Call me Alice," she interrupted. "It

sounds more like the time when you saved my life, Joe."

"Waal then, Miss Alice, the fact is I've had a letter from him, and I kinder think it's from my wife, though I ain't sure," he said, slowly. "And as I ain't much on the read of this hand-write, I've come to ask if ye wouldn't be so kind as to read what she says."

"Why, certainly," the young matron said at once. "Where is the letter, Joe?"

Joe handed it to her, and she scanned the address with some surprise.

"*Moses Embrie Milner*. Why, Joe, who is that?"

"That's me, miss," said Joe, with some pride. "It's a good name in aour parts, and I don't want to see it come to no harm by nothen' I mout do; so I took the name of Californy Joe, and it's like to stick to me. But please read the letter, miss."

The lady asked no more questions, but opened the letter and read the following lines, written in a pretty, lady-like hand:

"DEAREST HUSBAND:—

"I have not heard from you in so long that it seems as if you must have forgotten your poor little wife, that was so foolish as to let you go away to make your fortune. Do, for the sake of the love you said you bore me, come back as soon as you receive this, and take one look at the baby, if you go away the same day. Oh, husband, you don't know how like he is to his father; and as I sit here all alone, and look into his little face and think whether he will ever desert me as his father did, and go far away, never to return, it seems as if my heart would break. Do, dearest, come back to me, and I will never send you away again to look for a fortune. If we are poor, we are poor; but no riches, coming late, will compensate me for the loss of the husband I love so much. Come soon, dearest, and remember

"Your ever affectionate wife,

"LUCY MARY MILNER."

When Mrs. Hardy had finished this letter there was a short silence; and then she looked at Joe and saw that the big, rough fellow's eyes were dim with tears, as he murmured to himself:

"The baby, the baby! Hev I reely got a baby?"

"So it seems," was the smiling reply of the lady, "and if it is anything like mine, Joe, you will learn to idolize it in a little time. Well, what are you going to do now?"

For Joe had risen, without a word, and was going to the door.

At that door he turned, and said quietly:

"Miss Alice, I've did better than I thought I would when I come hyar, and I've made some money, which I war a-gwine to spend like the rest of them fools does on a tear. Naow I'm a-gwine hum to see my baby, and I'm gwine to take the Aspinwall steamer that leaves this very night. I've got enough to git hum, and thar's whar I'm gwine. Good-by, Miss Alice."

And before she could stop him he was off; and among the names of the passengers on the steamer "Golden Gate" that sailed that night, was found the name of "*Moses Embrie Milner*."

California Joe had resumed his true name and was going home to see his first baby.

THE END.

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